

THE MONITOR

News from West Pierce Fire & Rescue

Proudly serving the communities of Lakewood, University Place and Steilacoom



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Letter from the Chief

2023 appears to be the year we will finally move forward, beyond the pandemic. For the better part of three years, the pandemic has guided West Pierce Fire & Rescue's (WPFR) work. As challenging as it has been, we have not let it slow us down. In 2019, the community voted to renew the Maintenance and Operations Levy and support several key expansions to critical programs. Throughout the pandemic, WPFR has continued to move forward and keep our commitment to make those program improvements a reality.

In 2020, WPFR began hiring personnel required to staff two squads in the District. A squad is a small truck, which carries two Firefighter/EMTs, their protective and medical equipment, and a small cache of tools. A squad responds to calls relatively minor in nature, which would have historically been handled by a fire engine. Since they carry all of the protective equipment the firefighters need, they can also respond to provide additional assistance at major incidents, such as a structure fire or rescue call. The squads are very versatile vehicles, which are used in a variety of ways.

In addition to the new squads, in 2022, the District established a new program called Connected CARE, which stands for Community Access, Referral, and Education. The program is staffed by a nurse trained to connect people in need with the appropriate community services. The Connected CARE Manager takes referrals from firefighters for patients they see who have needs outside of an emergency response. These patients may be struggling with mental health issues, a substance abuse disorder, or lack of medical or financial resources. Our Connected CARE Manager works with these patients to help them receive the support they need, rather than using 9-1-1 as their primary source of assistance.

Along with the Connected CARE program, we added a fifth medic unit that is staffed 24 hours per day. The District now has a medical transport unit in five of our six stations. Each medic unit is staffed with one Paramedic and one Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). With approximately 80% of 9-1-1 calls being for medical aid, adding a fifth medic unit is a significant enhancement to emergency medical programs.

Another key resource the District was able to re-establish was the second Battalion Chief. A Battalion Chief manages the day-to-day field operations of all fire and medical personnel. Additionally, they serve as Incident Commanders, providing direction and safety of firefighters at a structure fire or major incident. The District previously staffed two Battalion Chiefs. Unfortunately, since the Great Recession, we have operated with only one. Thankfully, the District was finally able to re-establish this fundamental piece of our operations.

On August 1st, WPFR will once again be seeking a renewal of the Maintenance and Operations Levy. This is not a new tax; it is a replacement of the current four-year levy, approved by voters in 2019. By aggressively seeking grant funding, continuing to use responsible budget practices and working to develop innovative service delivery models, we have been able to leverage every levy dollar to continue delivering the high-caliber service you have asked for and come to expect from West Pierce Fire & Rescue.

Jim Sharp
Fire Chief

First Responder Health & Wellness

Employee health and wellness is essential to West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR). Reducing musculoskeletal injuries and carcinogen exposures through proactive risk management and implementing best practices helps keep our employees healthy throughout their career and on the job keeping our community safe.

Firefighters are routinely exposed to carcinogens through their line of work. Identifying and reducing these exposures are key to keeping them healthy. Firefighter protective clothing has been identified as an area where exposures can be reduced. After structure fires, firefighters now bag their protective equipment and place it in a separate compartment until it can be washed at the fire station, limiting their exposure to dirty, contaminated gear.

In the course of their work, firefighters are also susceptible to musculoskeletal injuries. Through training, firefighters can prepare for the physicality of the job and reduce injuries by doing warm-up stretching, hydrating and identifying potential hazards. On emergency medical calls, firefighters must often lift and move patients from complex spaces such as vehicles, stairwells or small rooms. By utilizing specialized equipment and practicing safe techniques, firefighters can safely lift and move patients without injury.

In an effort to research and develop strategies for improving firefighter health and safety, WPFR was selected to participate in a new program in partnership with the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I), Washington Fire Chiefs and the Washington State Council of Fire Fighters called the Firefighter Injury and Illness Reduction (FIIRE) Initiative. This two-year program gives WPFR unique access to experts in the field of firefighter occupational injuries and illnesses.

As a participant in the FIIRE Initiative, WPFR has access to state funding to reduce firefighter injuries and has already received a grant to purchase specialized equipment for removing carcinogens from firefighters' protective clothing. Additionally, WPFR receives a 5% reduction on L&I premiums. As part of the FIIRE Initiative, WPFR is not only improving the health and wellness of its own firefighters, but all firefighters across the state.

Thank you, Employees!

Since our last publication, eight members, with 238 years of combined service and valuable experience, have moved on to the next chapter in their lives. We know that each and every one was a leader, either by rank or experience in their craft, and they helped to prepare our future leaders for excellence.

Congratulations and thank you, West Pierce employees, on a job well done!

Garret Smith

Captain

1985 - 2023

Todd Rohde

Captain

1991 - 2023

Tony Sole

Firefighter/Paramedic

1991 - 2023

Darren Cole

Captain

1993 - 2023

Al Koenig

Firefighter/Engineer

1994 - 2023

Lynda Henderson

Captain

1996 - 2023

Dan Brown

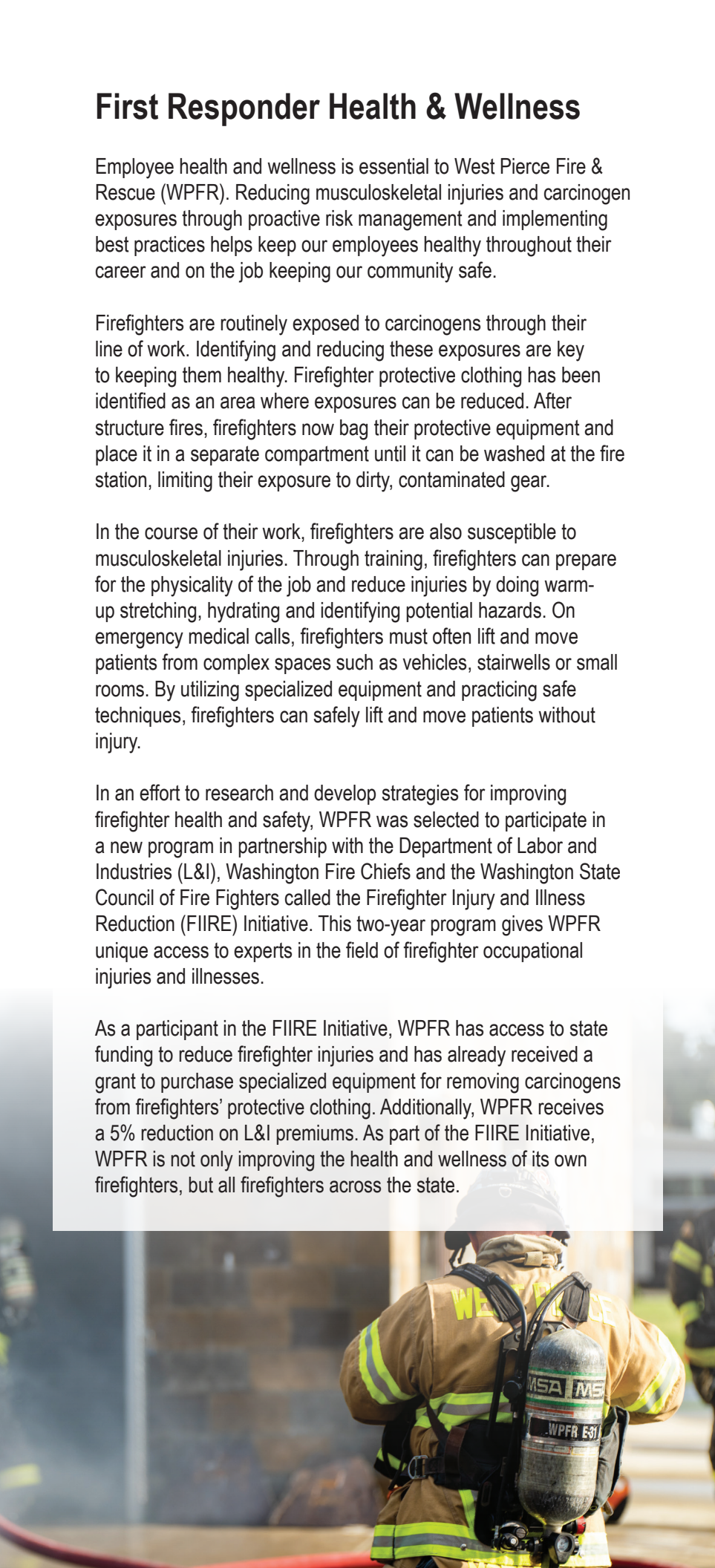
Firefighter/Paramedic

1996 - 2023

Vi Diamond

Firefighter/Paramedic

1998 - 2023



Upcoming EVENTS

CPR & FIRST AID CLASSES

August 12

October 7

December 9

This course covers adult, child and infant CPR with airway management, choking rescue, control of bleeding, splinting, bandaging, first aid for burns, sprains, strains, poison control, and more. This course meets Labor & Industries and Department of Social & Health Services Standards, but does NOT meet the requirements for the Healthcare Provider course.

CERT TRAINING

September 5 - 23

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training educates the community how to help themselves in the first few hours or days following a disaster, before emergency responders are able to reach them to render professional aid. Please visit our website for more information and how to register.

TRUCK & TRACTOR DAY

October 14 from 12 - 3 p.m.

Fort Steilacoom Park, Lakewood

Enjoy a fun day for the whole family! Children can climb on dozens of giant trucks and tractors and sit in the driver's seat & honk the horn. Children also receive free hayrides, hard hats, and pumpkins (while supplies last).

FALL SAFETY DAY

October 21 from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Station 21; 5000 Steilacoom Blvd. SW

Join us for Fall Safety Day where there will be fun activities for families, great safety information and of course, free pumpkins for kids!

GUIDE TO SERVICES

PRESCHOOL & DAYCARE EDUCATION



Fire safety programs are available for preschools and daycares to use in the classroom at no cost.

Teachers conduct several lessons of the curriculum and WPFR personnel come in to teach the final lesson so small children learn firefighters are their friends.

CUSTOM-FIT HELMETS & LIFE JACKETS



Fittings are scheduled by appointment and the wearer must be present in order to purchase. Please call or visit our website to schedule an appointment.

Helmets are available for \$11-15 and life jackets for \$17 each.

CAR SEAT INSTALLATIONS & CHECKS



Did you know that more than 50% of children are improperly restrained in vehicles?

Residents within the fire district may schedule an appointment with a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician to have their car seat installed or checked for proper installation.

BLOOD PRESSURE CHECKS



Stop by any fire station to have your blood pressure checked!

Please be advised when firefighters are out of the station on 9-1-1 calls or training, there may not be anyone available to assist. Thank you in advance for your patience and understanding.

STATION TOURS



Station tours are available for schools and community groups. Safety lessons and tours of the station and apparatus are held, all while learning what it's like to be a firefighter.

If you would like to bring a group to the fire station for a visit, please call or visit our website to schedule.

Enhancing Service Delivery

With nearly 18,000 calls for service annually, West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR) is per capita the busiest fire district in Pierce County. In the last two years, call volume has increased by 10%. With an ever-increasing demand for service, WPFR continually evaluates operational response models to ensure the community's needs are being addressed. As part of this process, WPFR has recently implemented two significant enhancements to fire and emergency medical service (EMS) response throughout the community.

In 2020, WPFR implemented a two-person resource known as a "squad" on a trial basis. After much success during the trial period, the first squad was established permanently in 2021. A squad is a heavy-duty passenger-style pickup truck with a cache of tools and equipment. By targeting specific 9-1-1 call types, this smaller resource can adequately respond and provide service to the community in place of larger, conventional apparatus, like fire engines or a ladder truck. This saves on fuel usage, reduces wear and tear on large apparatus, and improves resource availability, especially that of medic units. The program was expanded in 2022, where a second squad is located at the headquarters station in University Place.

Another key improvement was increasing the number of transport-capable medic units, which are staffed 24 hours per day, from four to five. Increasing the number of available medic units improves unit availability, response times and transport capabilities. Each medic unit is staffed with a minimum of one paramedic and one Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). This staffing approach allows the medic units to deliver the best care possible to patients, whether they are dealing with a minor illness or suffering from a critical, life-threatening emergency.

These operational improvements allow WPFR to continue providing a high level of service while addressing the ever-increasing number of emergency calls. The community's support in helping WPFR make these improvements is something everyone can be proud of.

Working Smoke Alarms Save Lives

West Pierce Fire & Rescue has dedicated countless hours to educating the community about the importance of smoke alarms and fire safety.

West Pierce Fire & Rescue's free smoke alarm program is available to residents within Lakewood and University Place. Appointments take approximately 15 minutes and West Pierce personnel will install or replace any alarms your home may need to ensure your alarms are working properly.

- ***Do you have smoke alarms in and outside every sleeping area?***
- ***Are your smoke alarms working properly?***
- ***Have you replaced your smoke alarms within the last ten years?***

If you answered 'no' to any of the above questions, please call 253.564.1623 today to schedule an appointment!

Connect with Us!

Looking for more information, upcoming events or recent news from West Pierce Fire & Rescue? Connect with us!

Station 31 (Headquarters)
3631 Drexler Drive West
University Place, WA 98466

Non-emergency (business) line
253.564.1623

www.westpierce.org

Follow Us on Social Media



Grant Funding Improves Service

Grant funding is not easy to receive, as it is a highly competitive process. With a lot of hard work and commitment, West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR) has been successful in receiving nearly \$3 million in grants since 2020.

During the pandemic, WPFR's operations changed greatly without warning. Managing the pandemic generated substantial, unanticipated increases in operating expenses. Fortunately, WPFR has a well-established program for seeking grants. These grants fund a variety of operational needs and programs. By continually evaluating the evolving needs of the community, WPFR is committed to seek out funding sources to maintain and improve service delivery. Being able to access these types of funds greatly improves the District's ability to respond effectively, while efficiently managing operational expenses. Below are the grants received since 2020:

Heavy Rescue Vehicle & Training

Total award: \$1,196,246

Funding was received to purchase a new heavy rescue vehicle and provide heavy rescue training. This vehicle carries all the specialty equipment the WPFR technical rescue team utilizes to manage a variety of highly specialized rescues, such as a major collision on the freeway or a building collapse.

This grant provided WPFR firefighters with rescue training and allowed the District to replace the current vehicle, which was an old beverage truck donated to WPFR approximately 30 years ago.

Wildland Urban Interface Training & Equipment

Total award: \$393,702

This grant funded training and equipment to manage wildland urban interface (WUI) fires. These types of fires are where residential neighborhoods abut heavily wooded areas, like the Chambers Creek canyon.

Summers are becoming dryer and hotter each year, making this is a new risk WPFR must address. This grant provided firefighters with the training and equipment needed to manage these types of fires safely.

Hazardous Materials Mitigation

Total award: \$85,700

The Department of Ecology awarded this funding for hazardous material mitigation. WPFR has a highly trained hazardous materials response team. This grant provided a variety of tools and equipment the team utilizes to properly manage and mitigate a hazardous materials call.

Emergency Management

Total award: \$230,000

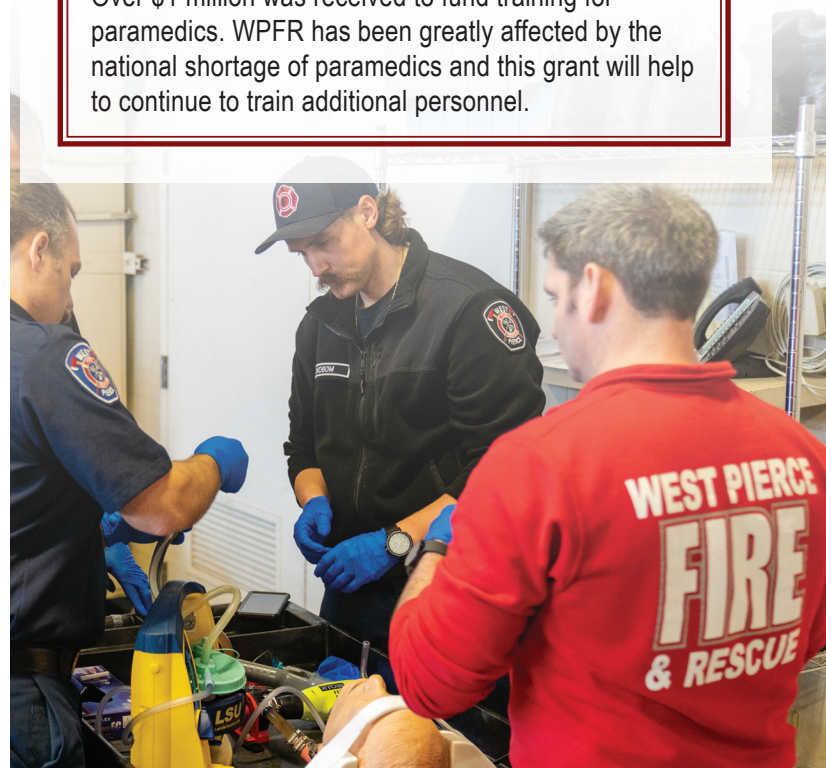
Funding was received from the City of Lakewood's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds in support of several emergency management projects. These include technology upgrades to all of WPFR meeting rooms and the District's emergency operations center, allowing for online and hybrid meetings.

Money was also received to establish a HAM radio site next to the District's emergency operations center. Funds were also made available to create the West Pierce Emergency Management Coalition's website to provide emergency messaging in multiple languages.

Paramedic Training

Total award: \$1,029,960

Over \$1 million was received to fund training for paramedics. WPFR has been greatly affected by the national shortage of paramedics and this grant will help to continue to train additional personnel.





Connected CARE Program Positively Impacts West Pierce Communities

In February 2022, West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR) implemented the Connected Community Access, Referral and Education (CARE) program. This program was created to empower residents of WPFR to manage their healthcare, 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.

In April 2022, WPFR's Connected CARE Program Manager, Karen Gilbert, launched the WPFR referral process. Gilbert is a Registered Nurse with over 27 years of experience, where 12 were directly related to case management. Referrals are sent to Gilbert directly from firefighters and paramedics on emergency calls who identify individuals that may benefit from the program, and range from ages 10 to 98. Some examples include: high utilizers of the 9-1-1 system for non-emergent hospital transports, a patient who lives alone and is starting to have declining health and requests resources, a patient firefighters have seen multiple times and is considered a high utilizer of healthcare services, or a patient who is having mental health issues and doesn't know how to navigate the system.

Historically, firefighters have not been trained in how to access these types of resources or how to navigate and coordinate them for patients. Currently, all responding firefighters are trained by

Gilbert on how to recognize and identify patients in need. At the completion of each call, firefighters are required to complete a section of their report which specifically addresses whether the patient is in need of a referral for services. Since the program started just over a year ago, there have been over 300 referrals.

Gilbert works directly with those in need navigating facility placement, transportation, food, social services, chronic disease management, healthcare access and behavioral health, to name a few. She also collaborates with community partners like the Lakewood Police Department Behavioral Health Team and other agencies who provide vital services in our community.

The Connected CARE program addresses an ongoing need within the community. Historically, some patients have used 9-1-1 and the emergency room as the first option to access care. The goal of this program is to provide patients with education on available resources, empowering them to manage their own healthcare, mental health and social needs. WPFR is excited to see the positive impact and success the Connected CARE program continues to have in order to meet that goal.

PLEASE
VOTE
AUGUST 1

WEST PIERCE FIRE & RESCUE

3631 Drexler Drive West
University Place, WA 98466

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SEATTLE, WA
PERMIT NO. 1
ECRWSS

www.westpierce.org/vote

The West Pierce Fire & Rescue Board of Fire Commissioners voted to place the **Maintenance and Operations levy** on the August 1st ballot.

Proposition 1 is a **replacement** of the current Maintenance and Operations levy. The request is for \$16.9 million dollars annually.

This funding supports 25% of the fire district's operations

West Pierce Fire & Rescue has six fully staffed fire stations, providing fire suppression, emergency medical treatment and transport, emergency rescue services, fire prevention programs, public education, and CERT training throughout Lakewood and University Place.

Calls for service have increased drastically

West Pierce Fire & Rescue is the most urbanized fire district in Pierce County, with the highest demand for service per capita. Since 2011, call volume has increased by nearly 36% and continues to trend upward.

This is not a new levy

Proposition 1 is a **replacement** of the Maintenance and Operations levy that has been supported by the community for nearly 50 years.

This funding is critical for continuing effective service delivery

During the last four-year levy period, the District added key resources, such as a fifth advanced life support transport unit, two squads, and a Connected CARE program to provide non-emergent medical care. Replacement of the current levy provides the necessary funding to continue these vital programs and maintains the current service level you have come to expect from the fire district.

