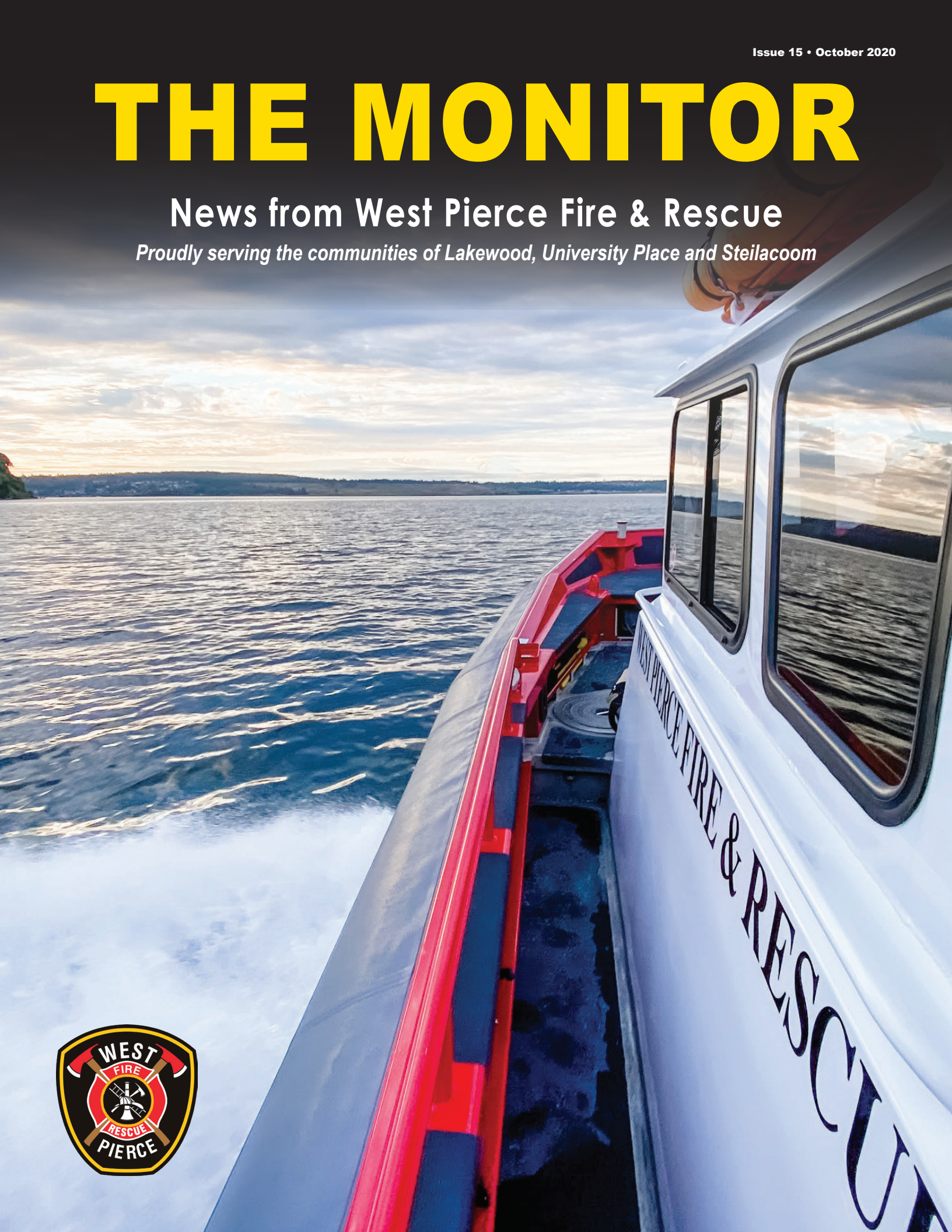


THE MONITOR

News from West Pierce Fire & Rescue

Proudly serving the communities of Lakewood, University Place and Steilacoom





Letter from the Chief

This year has been like no other. The challenges our community and department have faced in 2020 are unprecedented. Fortunately, our department is filled with dedicated, hardworking employees who have helped us overcome these challenges, embrace new work processes, and manage to make 2020 a successful and productive year.

Like most businesses, many of our employees have been working modified work-from-home schedules for most of the year. However, as an emergency response agency, the vast majority of our employees need to be on-site to perform their work. Providing a safe work environment is a top priority for us. Altered work schedules and telecommute plans were implemented for those employees who could work remotely, new social distancing rules are in effect for employees who need to be on-site, and new personal protective equipment (PPE) was purchased for all of our first responders. Even in the high-risk environment we work in, we have been able to maintain a relatively healthy workforce throughout the pandemic.

Providing emergency medical services (EMS) during a pandemic is extremely challenging. Throughout the year, our EMS division has worked nonstop to create safe and effective response plans for our crews to follow. Assuring an adequate supply of PPE, monitoring potential COVID-19 exposures, and tracking the health of our employees are just a few of the monumental tasks required of them. Working with the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, local hospitals, and other local and state healthcare resources, our EMS division has developed response plans that provide for the highest levels of employee and community safety.

One of the most unique challenges we faced this year was determining how to train our new employees. In January, we hired 16 new firefighters, the largest recruit class in our history.

When the stay-at-home orders were implemented, we were not even halfway through and had to temporarily suspend our academy. Due to the restrictions, we could no longer train our recruits in a traditional fashion. Fortunately, our training division came up with a modified curriculum that met appropriate social distancing standards and all of the recruits successfully graduated from the academy on time.

Due to the pandemic, we have been faced with a significant amount of unbudgeted expenditures this year. We have continued to aggressively seek out grants and have been extremely successful. We have received grant awards for a heavy rescue vehicle, rescue and auto extrication equipment, auto extrication training, emergency management programs and hazardous materials equipment, just to name a few. In total, we have received over \$1.3 million in grant funding to help us maintain a balanced budget.

West Pierce Fire & Rescue is extremely proud of the services we provide to the communities of Lakewood, University Place and Steilacoom. Even in these trying times, each and every West Pierce employee remains committed to compassionately delivering the high-quality services you deserve and have come to expect from your fire department.

Jim Sharp
Fire Chief

Assisting Neighbors in Need

When wildfires strike in Washington State, it is not uncommon to be asked the question, "is West Pierce sending firefighters to help?" Typically, the initial reply is "no," but there is more to the answer.

WPFR's jurisdiction is one of the most densely populated in Pierce County, meaning there are no large rural spaces like in neighboring fire districts. Because of this, WPFR does not train its firefighters in wildland firefighting, as that skill set is not commonly used and requires additional hours of annual training to maintain appropriate wildland certifications. However, this doesn't mean WPFR isn't equipped to handle brush fires, as crews are properly trained and equipped to respond to such calls.

While WPFR firefighters do not respond to wildland fires in a traditional sense, they do respond when a structural team is requested. This means firefighters respond to protect the structures nearby threatened by a wildfire. This most recently happened in both Bonney Lake and Graham, as these incidents required protection of homes and businesses, which is where a structural team of firefighters is most commonly used.

In addition to on-duty firefighters assisting locally in neighboring jurisdictions, many WPFR personnel are highly trained members of local incident management teams as well as FEMA Urban Search and Rescue teams.

Recently, the Washington State Task Force-1 FEMA Urban Search and Rescue team was deployed to Oregon to assist in search and rescue missions following devastating wildfires. Three WPFR personnel deployed with the team for approximately two weeks.

West Pierce personnel were also activated as part of the Pierce County Incident Management Team. Members of the team spent nearly a week in Bonney Lake supporting the mission of the Sumner Grade fire. Subsequently, additional members were deployed for two weeks supporting the COVID-19 response of the Chelan-Douglas Health District. Earlier this year, this same team responded to assist the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department with their COVID-19 response, so many of these individuals were already prepared to assist in this environment.

These teams have been requested by various agencies in need locally, statewide and nationally over the past few years. While they may not be directly involved in fighting wildfires, these skilled professionals are able to fulfill critical roles during large-scale incidents and disasters of all types.

CONNECT WITH US



FACEBOOK

Follow us on Facebook to see what's happening in our community. Facebook is where we share safety tips, showcase community partnerships, advertise for events and classes, and much more.



TWITTER

Follow us on Twitter for real time updates during large incidents. Twitter is our direct link to the local media, so it can be delivered to your feed instantly.



INSTAGRAM

Follow us on Instagram to see all things West Pierce. From incidents to safety tips to behind the scenes, our Instagram feed and stories have a little bit of everything.

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UNIVERSITY PLACE, WA 98466

253.564.1623
www.westpierce.org



Smoke Alarm Program Proven to Save Lives

Smoke alarms alert residences to smoke in their home, giving residents precious seconds when they matter most. That is why WPFR continually seeks out grant funding to continue its smoke alarm program.

This program has thrived for over a decade and has recently included a bilingual Smoke Alarm Program Coordinator. Martin Olmos, who is Spanish speaking, has helped WPFR reach more members of the community with education about smoke alarms. In the past year alone, more than 2,000 smoke and carbon monoxide alarms were installed in 810 residences in Lakewood and University Place.

Recently, crews responded to a mobile home fire where smoke alarms had been installed by WPFR personnel just weeks prior. The occupants were Spanish speaking and investigators worked with Olmos to understand what happened leading up to the incident. The smoke alarms alerted the occupants to the fire in their home and thankfully they were able to escape.

This is just one example of how this program has saved lives in the community, but there have been many others over the years. Being able to reach more residents is always the ultimate goal, as education is the cornerstone of fire and life safety efforts.

For more information about the smoke alarm program itself, please see the back page of this publication or visit www.westpierce.org/smoke-alarms.

Embracing Inclusion & Change

In the West Pierce Fire & Rescue Strategic Plan, seven strategic goals were established, one of which is "Inclusion & Diversity." As stated in the plan, the goal is to "foster a culture that embraces inclusion and diversity, both internally and externally." WPFR serves some of the most diverse communities in Pierce County. Reflecting and connecting to these communities is vitally important to the success of the organization.

From a historical perspective, the fire service as a whole has not been a very diverse industry. WPFR is taking deliberate steps to change this. One of the first steps was forming an Equity Team. The Equity Team is made up of a cross-section of dedicated employees seeking positive change by helping to foster an inclusive organization.

Equity Team members have attended numerous educational opportunities both locally and nationally to improve their understanding of issues surrounding diversity, equity and inclusion. Additionally, they have engaged the services of independent consultants to assist with work surrounding internal bias, systemic racism, cultural competency and community engagement. By bringing in these outside consultants, the team is able to build successful strategies while learning from people with diverse backgrounds of race, culture and gender.

The work of the Equity Team is helping to reshape the organization. Some of the most significant changes to date have been in the hiring process. Previously, applicants were required to pay a testing fee for the written exam and physical ability test. Additionally, they were required to be a state certified Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), which requires significant training to complete. Upon review, it showed the testing process was creating very high barriers, which significantly limited opportunities for many candidates.

WPFR now performs its own recruitment and provides a free written testing process. The national firm previously doing this recruitment work received about three percent minority applications. By doing recruitment internally, this number has grown to nearly 30 percent.

It is no longer a requirement candidates pay for the written or physical ability test, nor is it required to be an EMT, as this training is now a part of the recruit academy. With these changes, anyone can apply to be a firefighter at WPFR with no prior experience or training and it will be of no cost to apply or take the exam. These changes have helped level the playing field, regardless of experience, training or financial ability.

To be accomplished in a meaningful way, institutional change takes time and commitment. Change does not happen overnight, and WPFR is dedicated to the strategic plan and committed to being as progressive, vibrant and diverse as the communities it serves.



How COVID-19 has Impacted West Pierce Fire & Rescue

When the COVID-19 pandemic first reached Washington State in mid-January, very few forecasted the impact it would later have on our federal, state and local resources. Like most emergency response agencies, the impact on WPFR has been profound and left a significant mark on daily operations. Many of the changes will likely become a permanent fixture, such as virtual meetings and new, increased levels of personal protective equipment (PPE) usage and cleaning.

During the initial onset of the pandemic, day-to-day operations shifted instantly. The Emergency Medical Services (EMS) division restructured their work schedules to function 24/7. It was also necessary to bring additional personnel into the division to help carry the workload until internal systems were in place and able to sustain the operation.

They worked to secure patient tracking, manage internal contact tracing, develop new PPE decontamination guidelines and training, draft operational directives for managing medical aid calls and minimizing exposures, track PPE inventory, and resupply stations daily. One of the highest priorities was acquiring adequate levels of PPE. National shortages upon the onset of this pandemic made initial acquisition very difficult and therefore supplies on hand needed to be closely tracked and monitored.

Many of these changes have significantly increased the work of firefighters, as they conduct daily employee health screenings, increased daily station decontamination and detailed PPE inventory management. Even the method of putting on and taking off PPE has become increasingly complicated, in order to comply with current safety recommendations. Additionally, new challenges with communications on calls arose while wearing new, bulkier respiratory filtration masks, making it difficult to

be understood when speaking. Now training occurs with these masks on, in order to get used to the “new normal”.

Department-wide, a number of operational directives were implemented. These include measures that address wearing a mask and appropriate PPE, social distancing practices while at work, increased station cleaning and decontamination, minimizing personnel movement from station to station and facilitating alternative work schedules. Many WPFR personnel are still working alternative schedules and/or remotely. This has increased the utilization of remote applications and meeting services that have now become a daily tool for the organization.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has also caused several instances where personnel had to be quarantined as a result of an exposure. This involves extensive communication with health department epidemiologists to ensure proper procedures are being followed. A COVID-19 testing procedure has also been implemented in partnership with MultiCare, allowing expedient testing of those exposed. When an employee is quarantined, the EMS division coordinates daily check-ins which include monitoring for symptoms and addressing any special needs. Depending on the situation, employees may not be able to safely quarantine at home, so additional considerations are taken into account, such as housing, food, medical care, etc.

While COVID-19 has forced WPFR to pivot and respond appropriately, it is truly the nature of the industry. It has certainly been very complex to navigate, but WPFR is comprised of knowledgeable and dedicated personnel who want to do what's best for the organization and the community.



West Pierce Fire & Rescue's First All-Female Crew

Three West Pierce firefighters came to the station as they do for every other shift. They went to work, performed their daily tasks, ran 9-1-1 calls and wrote reports. The only difference was that these firefighters made up the first all-female crew West Pierce Fire & Rescue has ever had.

Firefighters Lisa Morin, Marney Fuller-VanSlyke and Rae Ann Haistings didn't think much of the day but mentioned others did. They would arrive on calls and people would notice there wasn't one male on the crew. That didn't mean there was

any difference in their skills or abilities, and instead, hoped to inspire any young girls who may have been watching.

In an interview with The News Tribune, Morin said, "Little girls or teenagers, maybe they see this female crew and realize that it's something they could do, and maybe it's never crossed their mind before. And not only is there one (female) firefighter, there are three on an engine who can do just as much as any other firefighter."

The fire service's work force has changed in demographics over the past few decades and WPFR is proud to be a part of that statistic. Of its 186 total full-time employees, 29 are female and nine of them serve in leadership roles. Of the 140 firefighters who run 9-1-1 calls daily, 11 are female. The first female firefighter was hired in 1996 and that number has consistently risen over the years. In 2017, WPFR promoted its first female to Assistant Chief and she has since been promoted to the rank of Deputy Chief.

Over the summer, WPFR started the testing process for hiring new firefighters and had to close the application period early because the threshold of 1,000 applications was met two weeks prior to the original closing date. Of those applications, approximately 15 percent were female. This number has gradually increased over the past few testing processes and WPFR is proud to see more diversity in its numbers.



Sixteen New Firefighters Graduate Recruit Academy Amidst COVID-19

The Red Knights Recruit Academy began in January just as others before it. The 16 recruits from West Pierce Fire & Rescue spent their first five weeks in EMT school to earn their certifications. On February 10, they began their firefighting academy, expecting to graduate in the middle of May.

The first five weeks of the academy went as planned and were very successful. Unfortunately, that was the beginning of COVID-19 restrictions in our state and gatherings larger than five people were no longer allowed. At that time, the academy was forced to suspend all operations.

While other learning opportunities were being evaluated, the recruits were utilized to help the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department and other agencies in support of their COVID-19 response efforts. The recruits assisted at testing events, in the Pierce County Emergency Operations Center, and with WPFR's logistics and EMS divisions. Some of their duties included securing and delivering PPE to all of the stations, and establishing necessary storage for shipments and supplies needed by WPFR crews, just to name a few. During this unprecedented time, WPFR needed to make sure the needs of first responders were met and having recruits available to assist in such tasks was extremely helpful.

Over the course of the following month, WPFR's training division worked tirelessly to determine how to hold a modified academy and graduate these recruits as close to on time as possible. Once they were able to do so, they broke the recruits into groups of four and continued working through the remaining fire academy curriculum. To say this was a strain on the instructors is an understatement, as they taught their classes repeatedly to ensure all of the recruits passed their required testing. At the end of May, all 16 recruits graduated from the academy, ready to serve the community.

WPFR is very proud of the time and dedication the training division, recruit academy instructors, administrative staff and logistics personnel put into these efforts. Without their diligence in ensuring these recruits got back into the classroom and on the drill ground, they would not have been able to graduate and start serving the community, quite possibly when they were needed most.



Strengthening Disaster Response Through Partnerships

In early 2020, the West Pierce Emergency Management Coalition (WPEMC) was created. This is a partnership between WPFR and the cities of Lakewood and University Place.

The purpose of the partnership is to create cohesive, comprehensive emergency management plans so when a disaster strikes, everyone is operating under the same guidelines. The coalition was just starting to create these plans when the challenges of COVID-19 hit.

The WPEMC worked together to make decisions that would benefit the entire community as whole. The group met virtually to ensure all agencies were moving in the same direction. Discussions included topics such as supply acquisition, policy creation surrounding working from home and working safely in the office, and economic recovery strategies, just to name a few. The key benefit of this partnership has been the power of collaboration.

A portion of this program is funded through the Washington State Emergency Management Preparedness Grant, while the rest of the costs are shared amongst the partners.

Through this partnership, it was possible to acquire supplemental grant funding to create pandemic plans for all three agencies, based on the lessons learned through COVID-19. The early results of the WPEMC are promising and WPFR is looking forward to seeing how it will benefit the communities in the coming years as this partnership grows stronger.



Working Smoke Alarms SAVE LIVES

WEST PIERCE FIRE & RESCUE
3631 Drexler Drive West
University Place, WA 98466

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

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



Do you have smoke alarms in and outside every sleeping area?

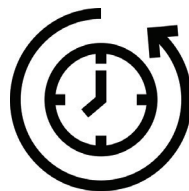


Are your smoke alarms working properly?



Have you replaced your smoke alarms within the last ten years?

If you answered 'no' to any of the questions above, please call 253.983.4594 today to schedule an appointment!



**CHANGE YOUR
CLOCK,
CHECK YOUR
ALARM!**

Daylight Savings is November 1st and what better way to use that additional hour than to check your smoke alarms?!

Over the years, the message has morphed from "change your clocks, change your battery." Since many smoke alarms no longer use a traditional 9-volt battery that must be changed annually, it's more important to test your alarms and only change the battery if your alarm has one to change.

Thank you, Retirees!

Since our last publication, 10 members of West Pierce Fire & Rescue with 277 years of combined service and valuable experience have moved on to their next chapter - *retirement*.

While it is difficult to see anyone leave the organization, WPFR strongly endorses succession. We encourage good leaders to share their knowledge and strive to develop others into future leaders. We know that each and every one was a leader, either by rank or experience in their craft, and the seeds of excellence were sown.

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



Paul Tinsley
Deputy Chief
1984 - 2020



Steve Hodge
Fleet Manager
1984 - 2020



Greg Tatom
Firefighter/Engineer
1989 - 2020



Loren Defazio
Captain
1991 - 2020



Gerald Foss
Firefighter/Engineer
1991 - 2020



Michael Hamilton
Captain
1993 - 2020



Gary Glasgow
Firefighter/Paramedic
1993 - 2020



Jay Sumerlin
Battalion Chief
1993 - 2019



Stephanie Roth
Finance Manager
1994 - 2020



Brian Bouton
Firefighter/Engineer
2007 - 2020