



Supporting Those Who Serve

National Volunteer Fire Council

7852 Walker Drive, Suite 375, Greenbelt, MD 20770; 202/887-5700 phone; 202/887-5291 fax
www.nvfc.org email: nvffice@nvfc.org

Volunteer Fire Service Fact Sheet

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) is the leading nonprofit membership association representing the interests of the volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services. Organized in 1976, the NVFC serves as the voice of the volunteer fire and emergency services in the national arena and provides invaluable tools, resources, programs, training, and advocacy for first responders across the nation. Each state firefighter's association elects a representative to the NVFC Board of Directors.

We welcome you to browse our web site at www.nvfc.org to learn more about the volunteer fire and emergency services and information regarding membership, training, legislation, and meetings.

This Fact Sheet was produced in order to provide an overall picture of today's volunteer fire and emergency services.

- **Volunteers comprise 69% of firefighters in the United States.**

Of the total estimated 1,140,750 volunteer and paid firefighters across the country, 786,150 are volunteer.¹

- **Communities served by volunteer firefighters depend on them to be their first line of defense for many types of emergencies.**

Volunteer firefighters are summoned to a wide array of emergencies across the country every day including fires, emergency medical incidents, terrorist events, natural disasters, hazardous materials incidents, water rescue emergencies, high-angle and confined space emergencies, and other general public service calls. The public relies on the volunteer emergency services to be their first line of defense in these emergencies. Volunteers spend an enormous amount of time training to prepare for these emergencies.

- **The majority of fire departments in the United States are volunteer.**

Of the total 30,052 fire departments in the country, 19,807 are all volunteer; 5,797 are mostly volunteer; 1,971 are mostly career; and 2,477 are all career.²

¹ *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2013*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, November, 2014.

² Ibid

• **The time donated by volunteer firefighters saves localities across the country an estimated \$139.8 billion per year.³**

• **The number of volunteer firefighters in the United States has declined by about 12% since 1984.⁴**

Major factors contributing to the decline include increased time demands, more rigorous training requirements, and the proliferation of two-income families whose members do not have time to volunteer. The two greatest sources of increased time demands are increased volume of emergency calls and increased training hours to comply with training standards.

Year	Number of Volunteer Firefighters	Year	Number of Volunteer Firefighters
1984	897,750	1999	785,250
1985	839,450	2000	777,350
1986	808,200	2001	784,700
1987	816,800	2002	816,600
1988	788,250	2003	800,050
1989	770,100	2004	795,600
1990	772,650	2005	823,650
1991	771,800	2006	823,950
1992	805,300	2007	825,450
1993	795,400	2008	827,150
1994	807,900	2009	812,150
1995	838,000	2010	768,150
1996	815,500	2011	756,400
1997	803,350	2012	783,300
1998	804,200	2013	786,150

• **While the number of volunteer firefighters is declining, the age of volunteer firefighters is increasing.**

Departments are finding it difficult to attract younger members due to a range of reasons, including increased demands on people's time, longer commuting distances to and from work, the prevalence of two-income households, and increased training requirements.

Age Profile of Firefighters by Size of Community, 1987⁵

**Mostly volunteer firefighters*

Size of Community	% Firefighters Under Age 30	% Firefighters Age 30-39	% Firefighters Age 40-49	% Firefighters Age 50 and Up
10,000-24,999	33.0%	33.8%	20.6%	12.6%
5,000-9,999	35.8%	32.4%	19.1%	12.7%
2,500-4,999	34.6%	32.5%	19.3%	13.6%
Under 2,500	29.7%	33.5%	20.9%	15.9%

Age Profile of Firefighters by Size of Community, 2013⁶

**Mostly volunteer firefighters*

Size of Community	% Firefighters Under Age 30	% Firefighters Age 30-39	% Firefighters Age 40-49	% Firefighters Age 50 and Up
10,000-24,999	27.6%	29.0%	24.6%	18.8%
5,000-9,999	30.8%	26.7%	21.8%	20.6%
2,500-4,999	28.3%	25.6%	22.2%	23.9%
Under 2,500	24.1%	23.8%	21.6%	30.5%

³ *The Total Cost of Fire in the United States*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, March 2014.

⁴ *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2013*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, November, 2014.

⁵ *Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience*. National Fire Protection Association, 1987.

⁶ *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2013*, National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, November 2014.

- **Recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters are two of the key issues being addressed jointly by the NVFC and the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA).**

The NVFC and USFA released a report entitled [*Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services: Challenges and Solutions*](#), which addresses the primary challenges departments face regarding retention and recruitment and then outlines proven solutions to overcome these obstacles. It is available for free download on the NVFC web site at www.nvfc.org.

The NVFC has also been instrumental in the launch of Fire Corps, a national initiative to recruit community members into local fire and EMS departments to perform non-emergency roles. This allows department members to focus on training and emergency response while at the same time increasing the services and programs the department can offer. Fire Corps is a component of the Department of Homeland Security's Citizen Corps initiative and is administered on a national level by the NVFC. For more information, visit www.firecorps.org.

In addition, the NVFC administers the 1-800-FIRE-LINE national recruitment campaign in an effort to boost the ranks in the volunteer fire service both operationally and non-operationally. Community members can call the toll-free 1-800-FIRE-LINE number from anywhere in the country to learn about the firefighter, EMS, and Fire Corps opportunities in their community. The campaign also includes resources for fire departments and state fire associations to implement and market the campaign. Learn more at www.1800fireline.org.

In 2014, the NVFC received a SAFER grant from FEMA to implement a nationwide recruitment and retention campaign. Through this new program, the NVFC will develop resources, tools, and customizable outreach materials to assist local departments in recruiting and retaining personnel. Components of this program will launch in mid-2015.

To address the aging of the fire service and foster the next generation of firefighters and EMS personnel, the NVFC launched the National Junior Firefighter Program. Supported by Tyco, Spartan Motors, Inc., and California Casualty, the NVFC National Junior Firefighter Program serves as an umbrella for junior firefighter programs nationwide to promote youth participation within the fire and emergency services community. In addition, youth can use the program to locate a local junior firefighter program, keep track of their hours of service, and find additional resources for junior firefighters. The goal is to get more youth involved in the fire service while they are young, thus fostering a lifelong connection with the emergency services where they can continue to serve as volunteer or career firefighters or community supporters of the fire service throughout their adulthood. Learn more at www.nvfc.org/juniors.

Retention and Recruitment Challenges: Root Causes ⁷

Sources Of Challenge	Contributing Factors
Time Demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the two-income family and working multiple jobs • increased training time demands • higher emergency call volume • additional demands within department (fundraising, administrative)
Training Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • higher training standards and new federal requirements • more time demands • greater public expectation of fire department's response capabilities (broader range of services such as EMS, Hazmat, technical rescue, etc.) • additional training demands to provide broader range of services • recertification demands
Increasing Call Volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fire department assuming wider response roles (EMS, Hazmat, technical rescue) • increasing emergency medical call volume • increase in number of automatic fire alarms
Changes In The "Nature Of The Business"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abuse of emergency services by the public • less of an emphasis on social aspects of volunteering
Changes In Sociological Conditions (In Urban And Suburban Areas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transience • loss of community feeling • less community pride • less of an interest or time for volunteering • two-income family and time demands • "me" generation
Changes In Sociological Conditions (In Rural Areas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employers less willing to let employees off to run calls • time demand • "me" generation
Leadership Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor leadership and lack of coordination • authoritative management style • failure to manage change
Federal Legislation And Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair Labor Standards Act interpretation • "2 in, 2 out" ruling requiring four firefighters on scene before entering hazardous environment • Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) live-fire burn limitations
Increasing Use Of Combination Departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disagreements among chiefs or other department leaders • friction between volunteer and career members
Higher Cost Of Housing (In Affluent Communities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • volunteers cannot afford to live in the community they serve
Aging Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greater number of older people today • lack of economic growth and jobs in some towns
Internal Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disagreements among departmental leaders • friction between volunteer and career members

⁷ *Retention & Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services: Challenges & Solutions*. National Volunteer Fire Council and United States Fire Administration (FA-310), May 2007.

• **Fire department call volumes continue to increase.**

Most fire departments across the country have experienced a steady increase in calls over the past two decades. This is a major source of the increased time demands on volunteer firefighters. The increase in calls, coupled with the decline in the number of volunteer firefighters, means that fire departments have to do more with less. Most of the increase is attributed to a sharp increase in the number of emergency medical calls and false alarms. The number of fire calls has actually declined over the period.

Year	Total	Year	Total
1986	11,890,000	2000	20,520,000
1987	12,237,500	2001	20,965,500
1988	13,308,000	2002	21,303,500
1989	13,409,500	2003	22,406,000
1990	13,707,500	2004	22,616,500
1991	14,556,500	2005	23,251,500
1992	14,684,500	2006	24,470,000
1993	15,318,500	2007	25,334,500
1994	16,127,000	2008	25,252,500
1995	16,391,500	2009	26,534,500
1996	17,503,000	2010	28,205,000
1997	17,957,500	2011	30,098,000
1998	18,753,000	2012	31,854,000
1999	19,667,000	2013	31,644,500

• **Small and mid-sized communities rely heavily on volunteer firefighters.**

Small communities (populations under 10,000) across the U.S. are typically protected by all volunteer departments. In some cases, however, these communities have hired a few paid firefighters to assist. Mid-sized communities (populations above 10,000) are typically served by combination volunteer and paid departments. Large communities (populations over 100,000) are most often protected by combination volunteer and paid departments that consist of primarily paid staff. There are few strictly paid fire departments in the U.S., but those that exist are primarily found in very urban areas.

Population Protected	Career	Volunteer	Total
1,000,000 or more	45,050	400	45,450
500,000 to 999,999	35,500	8,200	43,700
250,000 to 499,999	26,450	1,500	27,950
100,000 to 249,999	53,850	1,900	55,750
50,000 to 99,999	42,250	7,800	50,050
25,000 to 49,999	49,700	19,800	69,500
10,000 to 24,999	56,900	75,600	132,500
5,000 to 9,999	22,650	101,050	123,700
2,500 to 4,999	11,300	171,950	183,250
under 2,500	10,950	397,950	408,900
	354,600	786,150	1,140,750

⁸ *Fire Loss in the United States 2013*, National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, September 2014.

⁹ *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2013*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, November, 2014.

- **47 of the 106 firefighters who died in the line of duty in 2013 were volunteers.**¹⁰

The leading cause of death for on-duty firefighters was stress/overexertion, resulting in 37 deaths. Of these, 36 were caused by heart attack. The second leading cause of death was becoming caught or trapped, claiming 29 firefighters. Nine firefighters died as the result of vehicle crashes.

The NVFC has embarked on an aggressive campaign to reverse the trend of firefighter deaths by heart attack. The NVFC Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program is the nation's only heart attack awareness campaign targeted at all fire and emergency medical personnel, both volunteer and career. Visit the program's web site at www.healthy-firefighter.org.

The NVFC focuses on a variety of safety and health issues through the B.E.S.T. Priorities for Firefighter Health and Safety, which include best practices for Behavior, Equipment, Standards and Codes, and Training. View information and resources at www.nvfc.org/health_safety.

The NVFC also partners with the International Association of Fire Chiefs to sponsor International Fire/EMS Safety and Health Week each June. Learn more at www.safetyandhealthweek.org.

- **Volunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians across the country meet national and/or state training standards.**

Each state adopts its own training requirements that apply to volunteer firefighters. Many states require that volunteers meet the National Fire Protection Association's *Standard 1001: Firefighter Professional Qualifications*. This establishes a very rigorous course of classroom and practical evolutions for basic training. This same standard is commonly used to train paid firefighters. The NVFC recommends all volunteer fire departments set a goal that personnel attain, at a minimum, a level of training that meets or exceeds NFPA 1001 or an equivalent state standard in order to engage in fire suppression. Likewise, volunteer emergency medical responders are trained to the national training criteria established by the U.S. Department of Transportation and other standards setting bodies.

- **Volunteers invest a large amount of time serving their communities.**

There is no national average of the amount of time a volunteer firefighter gives to his or her community. Volunteering in the fire and EMS service, however, is one of the most demanding volunteer activities today. Time commitments include operational responses (often at a moment's notice), training, fundraising, vehicle and station maintenance, and various administrative duties.

- **The cost to train and equip a firefighter is approximately \$27,095.**

Below are average expenses associated with firefighting:*

Helmet:	\$ 300	Gloves:	\$ 95
Coat:	\$ 1,200	SCBA:	\$6,300
Pants:	\$ 875	Radio:	\$3,700
Boots:	\$ 300	Thermal Imager:	\$1,200
Hood:	\$ 40	Training:	\$7,800

¹⁰ *Firefighter Fatalities in the United States in 2013*, U.S. Fire Administration, Emmitsburg, MD, November 2014.

*Product costs vary depending on a variety of factors, and these are just estimates. Training costs vary considerably from state to state and jurisdiction to jurisdiction, depending on what level and types of training are required.

- **Firefighting and emergency medical equipment is very expensive.**

The cost of firefighting equipment is listed below. Equipment can range in cost depending on features and specifications.

Fire pumper: \$150,000 - \$400,000

Ladder truck: \$400,000 - \$750,000

Ambulance: \$80,000 - \$150,000

Advanced life support medical equipment: \$10,000 - \$30,000

- **The U.S. has one of the higher fire death rates in the industrialized world, with 11 deaths per million population in 2011. However, its standing has greatly improved over the last two decades, and the fire death rate in the U.S. has declined by 21 percent from 2001 to 2010.¹¹ In 2012:**

- Every 25 seconds, a fire department responds to a fire somewhere in the nation.
- 3,240 civilians lost their lives as the result of fire.
- 85 percent of all civilian fire deaths occurred in residences.
- There were 15,925 civilian fire injuries reported.
- There were an estimated 1.24 million fires.
- Direct property loss due to fires was estimated at \$11.5 billion.¹²

¹¹ *Fire Loss in the United States (2000-2011)*. U.S. Fire Administration. Accessed January 6, 2015.
http://www.usfa.fema.gov/statistics/estimates/trend_overall.shtm

¹² *Fire Loss in the United States During 2013*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, September 2014.