



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Stevens County Fire District 1 struggling with high call volumes

(Clayton, Wash.) – Fire Chief Mike Bucy is sounding an alarm for residents of Stevens County Fire District 1. Record call volumes, a decline in volunteer firefighters and antiquated fire stations are making it difficult for this mostly-volunteer organization to keep up with the rising demand for emergency services.

Emergency calls have increased 21% in the past year alone, but the fire district is operating with 20% fewer volunteer firefighters. Many of the volunteers have aged out of service, moved away, or have other work commitments that prevent them from serving. Recruitment efforts have been steady, but Chief Bucy says he is finding it difficult to recruit new people without adequate facilities and equipment.

Two of the fire district's busiest stations at Suncrest and Loon Lake are outdated and pose a risk to firefighter health and safety. The stations lack proper decontamination facilities or ventilation systems to move diesel exhaust away from personnel inside buildings. Both stations lack sleeping quarters, which means volunteers have to respond to calls from home or work, which takes longer to reach people in an emergency.

The fire district needs to purchase new water tenders, but the stations aren't big enough to store them. Loon Lake is due for one of those new tenders, but, at almost 12 feet tall and 32 feet in length, the tender wouldn't fit in the station. Storing expensive apparatus outside leaves it vulnerable to weather, possible vandalism and would reduce its usable life.

"We are a modern day fire department with complex emergencies," said Chief Mike Bucy. "We must have adequate facilities and equipment to serve our community."

Stevens County Fire District 1 has been talking with its community for four years about the need to replace the two stations at Loon Lake and Suncrest. Remodeling the stations was considered, but due to the age, construction and property constraints, structural engineers ruled out that option early in the project.

The two replacement stations will be designed to meet the emergency needs of the community for the next 75 years. The facilities will have decontamination units, training space and proper ventilation to move exhaust fumes away from personnel inside buildings. They also will include sleeping quarters, which will improve emergency response time by five minutes on average.

Chief Bucy says that he also would like to hire one additional full-time firefighter to provide some relief to the volunteers and better fund the fire district's equipment replacement program. Both of these items would improve the day-to-day operations of the fire district.

The Board of Fire Commissioners will consider asking voters to approve funding this fall to make these improvements, and modernize the fire district. The estimated amount would be 52.5 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value or \$8.75 per month (\$105 per year) for the owner of a \$200,000 home. An extensive public process will take place this spring before the Board votes to put any funding measure on the ballot.

“We’re struggling to keep up with the demand for emergency services,” says Chief Bucy. “But, we have a plan to make it better.”

Stevens County Fire Protection District 1 provides structure and wildland fire protection, technical rescue, hazardous materials response, and emergency medical service for 13,500 people (22,000 during the summer) over 375 square miles. The fire chief, seven full-time and 40 volunteer firefighter/emergency medical technicians (EMTs) respond to an average of 1,100 calls per year.

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