



*Supporting Those Who Serve*

**National Volunteer Fire Council**

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## 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, 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](http://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 71% of firefighters in the United States.**

Of the total estimated 1,148,100 volunteer and paid firefighters across the country, 812,150 are volunteer.<sup>1</sup>

- **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 30,165 fire departments in the country, 20,857 are all volunteer; 5,099 are mostly volunteer; 1,752 are mostly career; and 2,457 are all career.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2009*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, October, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

- **Services contributed by volunteer firefighters save localities across the country an estimated \$128 billion per year.<sup>3</sup>**

- **The number of volunteer firefighters in the United States has declined by over 10% since 1984.<sup>4</sup>**

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

- **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, 1987<sup>5</sup>**

*\*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, 2009<sup>6</sup>**

*\*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	29.9%	29.4%	23.9%	16.8%
5,000-9,999	32.3%	27.3%	22.1%	21.8%
2,500-4,999	30.2%	25.8%	22.1%	21.8%
Under 2,500	24.2%	24.4%	24.1%	27.4%

<sup>3</sup> *The Total Cost of Fire in the United States*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, March 2010.

<sup>4</sup> *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2009*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, October, 2010.

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

<sup>6</sup> *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2009*, National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, October 2010.

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

The NVFC and USFA have released a report entitled [\*Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services: Challenges and Solutions\*](#). The report 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](http://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](http://www.firecorps.org).

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 Spartan Motors, Inc. and Tyco International, 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](http://www.nvfc.org/juniors).

## Retention and Recruitment Root Causes <sup>7</sup>

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

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<sup>7</sup> *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	1999	19,667,000
1987	12,237,500	2000	20,520,000
1988	13,308,000	2001	20,965,500
1989	13,409,500	2002	21,303,500
1990	13,707,500	2003	22,406,000
1991	14,556,500	2004	22,616,500
1992	14,684,500	2005	23,251,500
1993	15,318,500	2006	24,470,000
1994	16,127,000	2007	25,334,500
1995	16,391,500	2008	25,252,500
1996	17,503,000	2009	26,534,500
1997	17,957,500	2010	28,205,000
1998	18,753,000		

• **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 very few purely 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	36,800	650	37,450
500,000 to 999,999	35,050	5,700	40,750
250,000 to 499,999	27,750	3,300	31,050
100,000 to 249,999	50,550	2,300	52,850
50,000 to 99,999	43,600	7,750	51,350
25,000 to 49,999	50,250	23,250	73,500
10,000 to 24,999	53,400	75,850	129,250
5,000 to 9,999	20,650	108,800	129,450
2,500 to 4,999	9,850	183,850	193,700
under 2,500	8,050	400,600	408,650
	335,950	812,150	1,148,100

<sup>8</sup> *Fire Loss in the United States During 2010*, National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, September 2011

<sup>9</sup> *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2009*, National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, October, 2010

- **56 of the 87 firefighters who died in the line of duty in 2010 were volunteers.**<sup>10</sup>

The leading cause of death for on-duty firefighters was stress/overexertion, resulting in 55 deaths. Of these, 50 were caused by heart attack (up from 39 in 2009). The second leading cause of death was vehicle crashes, claiming 11 firefighters (down from 16 in 2009).

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. The Program's components include a trade show booth that provides free resources and health screenings to emergency personnel; the *Heart-Healthy Firefighter Resource Guide*; the Health and Wellness Advocate Workshop; the Fired Up for Fitness Challenge; a *Cookbook*; a monthly e-newsletter; and much more. Visit the Program's web site at [www.healthy-firefighter.org](http://www.healthy-firefighter.org). The Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program is a collaboration of the NVFC and the Department of Homeland Security.

Starting in August 2007, the NVFC also sponsors an annual [National Firefighter Health Week](#) to focus attention on a broad range of firefighter health issues.

- **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:	\$ 225	Gloves:	\$ 95
Coat:	\$ 1,200	SCBA:	\$4,300
Pants:	\$ 900	Radio:	\$3,700
Boots:	\$ 235	Thermal Imager:	\$8,600
Hood:	\$ 40	Training:	\$7,800

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<sup>10</sup> *Firefighter Fatalities in the United States in 2010*, U.S. Fire Administration, Emmitsburg, MD, September 2011.

- **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 12.4 deaths per million population in 2007. However, its standing has greatly improved over the last two decades, and the fire death rate in the U.S. has declined by 66 percent from 1979 to 2007.<sup>11</sup> In 2010:**

- Every 24 seconds, a fire department responds to a fire somewhere in the nation.
- There were 3,120 civilians that lost their lives as the result of fire.
- 85 percent of all civilian fire deaths occurred in residences.
- There were 17,720 civilian fire injuries reported.
- There were an estimated 1.33 million fires.
- Direct property loss due to fires was estimated at \$11.59 billion.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Fire Death Rate Trends: An International Perspective*. Topical Fire Report Series: 12(8). U.S. Fire Administration, Emmitsburg, MD, July 2011.

<sup>12</sup> *Fire Loss in the United States During 2010*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, September 2011.