



### National Volunteer Fire Council

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## 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 72% of firefighters in the United States.**

Of the total estimated 1,148,850 volunteer and paid firefighters across the country, 827,150 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 30,170 fire departments in the country, 21,235 are all volunteer; 4,830 are mostly volunteer; 1,790 are mostly career; and 2,315 are all career.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2008*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, October, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

- **Services contributed by volunteer firefighters save localities across the country an estimated \$37.2 billion per year.**<sup>3</sup>

- **The number of volunteer firefighters in the United States has declined by over 8% 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
1984	897,750
1985	839,450
1986	808,200
1987	816,800
1988	788,250
1989	770,100
1990	772,650
1991	771,800
1992	805,300
1993	795,400
1994	807,900
1995	838,000
1996	815,500
1997	803,350
1998	804,200
1999	785,250
2000	777,350
2001	784,700
2002	816,600
2003	800,050
2004	795,600
2005	823,650
2006	823,950
2007	825,450
2008	827,150

- **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, 2008<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	29.4%	28.6%	24.4%	17.6%
5,000-9,999	30.7%	27.1%	22.4%	19.8%
2,500-4,999	29.2%	26.4%	22.5%	21.9%
Under 2,500	22.8%	26.3%	24.7%	26.2%

<sup>3</sup> *Economic Impact of the Volunteer Fire Service Project*. National Volunteer Fire Council Foundation, Washington, DC, May 2004.

<sup>4</sup> *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2008*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, October, 2009.

<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 2008*, National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, October 2009.

• **Recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters is one of the key issues being addressed jointly by the NVFC and 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.**<sup>8</sup>

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

• **Small and mid-sized communities rely heavily on volunteer firefighters.**<sup>9</sup>

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.

**Career and Volunteer Firefighters in the U.S. by Population Protected, 2007**

Population Protected	Career	Volunteer	Total
1,000,000 or more	35,900	400	36,300
500,000 to 999,999	32,450	6,650	39,100
250,000 to 499,999	27,900	5,100	33,000
100,000 to 249,999	48,000	4,300	52,300
50,000 to 99,999	42,150	8,050	50,200
25,000 to 49,999	50,000	24,250	74,250
10,000 to 24,999	48,800	81,100	129,900
5,000 to 9,999	17,750	106,150	123,900
2,500 to 4,999	8,400	192,200	200,600
under 2,500	10,350	399,000	409,350
	321,700	827,150	1,148,850

<sup>8</sup> *Fire Department Calls*, National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, 2009

<sup>9</sup> *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2008*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, October, 2009

**• 66 of the 118 firefighters who died in the line of duty in 2008 were volunteers.<sup>10</sup>**

The leading cause of death for on-duty firefighters was stress/overexertion, resulting in 52 deaths. Of these, 45 were caused by heart attack (down from 52 the in 2007). The second leading cause of death was vehicle crashes, claiming 28 firefighters.

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 screenings to emergency personnel for heart disease risk factors such as cholesterol as well as resource distribution and a fitness component; the *Heart-Healthy Firefighter Resource Guide*; a *Cookbook*; a monthly e-newsletter; a bi-monthly printed 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. 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 2008*, U.S. Fire Administration, Emmitsburg, MD, September 2009.

- **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 highest fire death rates in the industrialized world, with 12.4 deaths per million population in 2005.<sup>11</sup> In 2008:**

- Fire killed more Americans than all natural disasters combined.
- There were 3,320 civilians that lost their lives as the result of fire.
- 84 percent of all civilian fire deaths occurred in residences.
- There were an estimated 1.5 million fires.
- Direct property loss due to fires was estimated at \$15.5 billion.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Survey of Fire Departments for 2005 U.S. Fire Experience*. National Fire Protection Association.

<sup>12</sup> *The Overall Fire Picture – 2008*, U.S. Fire Administration web site.