



## National Volunteer Fire Council

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# Fact Sheet

The National Volunteer Fire Council is a non-profit membership association representing the interests of the volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services. Organized in 1976, the NVFC serves as the voice for the volunteer fire and emergency services. The NVFC is the emergency responder's representative in the national policy arena and on numerous national and international committees and organizations. Each state firefighter's association elects a representative to the NVFC.

We welcome you to browse our website 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 73% of firefighters in the United States.**  
Of the total estimated 1,096,250 volunteer and paid firefighters across the country, 800,050 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 30,542 fire departments in the country, 21,671 are all volunteer; 5,271 are mostly volunteer; 1,582 are mostly career; and 2,018 are all career.<sup>2</sup>
- **Services contributed by volunteer firefighters save localities across the country an estimated \$37.2 billion per year.**<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2003*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, Massachusetts, October, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Economic impact of the volunteer fire service project*. National Volunteer Fire Council Foundation, Washington, DC, May 2004

- **The number of Volunteer Firefighters in the United States has declined more than 10% since 1983.<sup>4</sup>**

Major factors contributing to the decline include increased **time demands**, more rigorous training standards, 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 emergency calls and increased training hours to comply with training standards.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Volunteer Firefighters</b>
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

- **Recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters** is one of the key issues being addressed jointly by the NVFC and U.S. Fire Administration. The NVFC and USFA have released a report entitled *Recruitment and Retention in the Volunteer Fire Service: Problems and Solutions*. The report is being updated in 2005 and will be released soon.

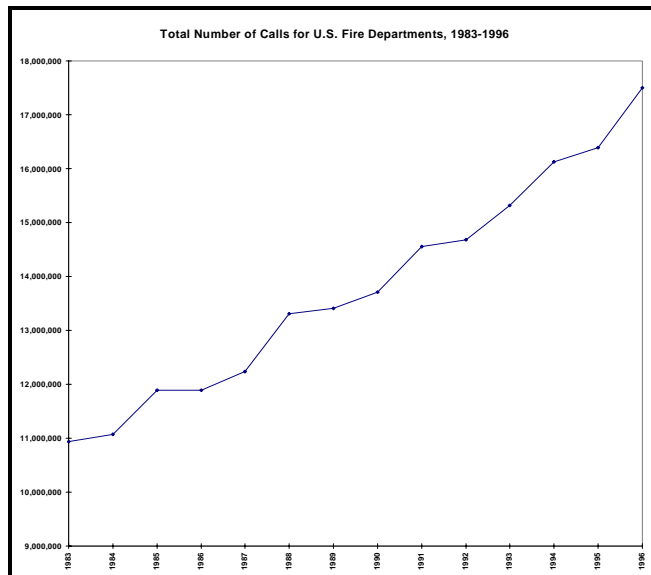
The NVFC has also been instrumental in the launch of Fire Corps, a national initiative to recruit citizens into the fire department to perform non-operational roles. The program is a partnership between the Department of Homeland Security, the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the International Association of Fire Fighters. For more information, visit [www.firecorps.org](http://www.firecorps.org)

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2003. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, Massachusetts, October, 2003.

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

Most fire departments across the country have experienced a steady increase in calls over the past decade.<sup>5</sup> 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.



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

Small communities (those with populations under 10,000) across the United States are typically protected by all volunteer departments. In some cases, however, these communities have hired a few paid firefighters to assist. Mid-sized communities (those with populations above 10,000) are typically served by combination volunteer and paid departments. Large communities (those with 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 United States, but those that exist are primarily found in very urban areas.

*Volunteer and Paid Firefighters in the U.S. by Population Protected, 2002*

<b>Population Protected</b>	<b>All Career</b>	<b>Mostly Career</b>	<b>Mostly Volunteer</b>	<b>All Volunteer</b>	<b>Total</b>
1,000,000 or more	77.8%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
500,000 to 999,999	62.5	29.2	8.3	0.0	100.0
250,000 to 499,999	77.4	22.6	8.7	0.0	100.0
100,000 to 249,999	86.3	11.3	1.3	1.3	100.0
50,000 to 99,999	72.6	17.8	7.7	1.9	100.0
25,000 to 49,999	37.7	23.6	30.2	8.5	100.0
10,000 to 24,999	17.1	19.0	43.5	20.4	100.0
5,000 to 9,999	4.2	7.1	36.5	52.2	100.0
2,500 to 4,999	1.3	1.5	16.9	80.3	100.0
Under 2,500	0.3	0.6	5.1	94.0	100.0
All Departments	6.6	5.2	17.3	70.9	100.0 <sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2003*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, Massachusetts, October, 2003.

- 76 of the 107 firefighters who died in the line of duty in 2004 were Volunteers.**<sup>7</sup>  
 The leading cause of death was heart attacks, followed by vehicle accidents. The NVFC has embarked on an aggressive campaign to reverse the trend of death by heart attack. The NVFC Heart Healthy Firefighter program travels the country providing complimentary cholesterol screenings, body composition and blood pressure screenings. The Heart Healthy Firefighter program has developed a resource guide, a monthly e-newsletter and has its own website at <http://healthy-firefighter.org> The program is a collaboration of NVFC and the Department of Homeland Security.

- 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 establish 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, fund raising, vehicle and station maintenance, and various administrative duties.

- The cost to train and equip a firefighter is approximately \$7,400.**  
 Below are average expenses associated with firefighting:

<i>Equipment</i>	
Protective Clothing	\$ 2,000
Self-contained Breathing Apparatus	4,500
 <i>Training</i>	
Firefighter I-II	\$500
Emergency Medical Technician - Basic	300
Hazardous Materials Awareness	100
Emergency Vehicle Operator	100
	<u>100</u>
	\$ 7,400

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<sup>7</sup> *Firefighter Fatalities in the U.S. 2004* U.S. Fire Administration, Emmitsburg, Maryland, 2005.

- **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 at 13.5 deaths per million population.**
- **Fire killed more Americans than all natural disasters combined.**
- **81 percent of all civilian fire deaths occurred in residences.**
- **Just under 1.6 million fires were reported. Many others went unreported, causing additional injuries and property loss.**
- **Direct property loss due to fires was estimated at \$12.3 billion.**
- **There were 3,925 civilians that lost their lives as the result of fire.**
- **Volunteer Firefighters serve on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Urban Search and Rescue Teams.** Several of the US&R Teams such as Missouri Task Force 1, Fairfax County, Virginia and Montgomery County, Maryland include volunteer members. US&R Teams have been deployed to disaster scenes both nationally and internationally.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *The Overall Fire Picture for 2003.* U.S. Fire Administration Web Page.