



TOWN OF ABINGDON

133 West Main Street • PO Box 789 • Abingdon, VA 24212

December 15, 2023

RE: FY2024-2025 Abingdon Fire Department Budget Request

Jason Berry, County Administrator
County of Washington
One Government Circle
Abingdon, Virginia 24210

Dear Mr. Berry:

The Town of Abingdon provides fire services for the Town of Abingdon as well as the Abingdon Fire Service District (AFSD), an area that is near the Town but not within the corporate limits. As the cadre of volunteers and part-time firefighters has thinned over the past decade, the Town of Abingdon has been adding additional dollars to the Abingdon Fire Department's budget to provide for adequate staffing during the hours that it is statistically more probable for a fire call.

When there is a structural fire, the most important criteria for saving lives and property are the time it takes to get water on the fire. That gap, known as the response time, is singularly the most critical ingredient to having a successful outcome from a fire. By having paid personnel on duty when there is most likely to be a fire, the AFD has reduced the response times consistently. The results of these efforts have paid off:

2021 - Town 7 minutes 42 seconds, Service District 13 minutes 15 seconds

2022 - Town 8 minutes 08 seconds, Service District 12 minutes 54 seconds

2023 - Town 7 minutes 20 seconds, Service District 10 minutes 54 seconds

For 2023, we added additional budgetary dollars to have two firefighters working during the peak call volume hours. These are also supplemented by part-time firefighters working. As the data shows, these adjustments have resulted in a more than 2-minute response time reduction for calls not in the Town limits.

In Virginia, most similarly sized counties with the same form of government that Washington County utilizes have a levy (Fire or Fire/EMS or EMS to pay) for fire services or fire/EMS. This is the standard fare across the state. While other states use this model

Locality	Population	System type	# of FD	Fire Budget	Fire Levy/\$100	Total Fire Levy revenue	Total locality budget
Culpeper County	53,596	Combination	9	\$2,447,977.00	.07	\$2,447,977.00	\$231,335,644.00
Fauquier County	72,972	Combination	9	\$25,982,646.00	.143 - real estate .25 - personal property	\$21,433,013.00	\$419,700,000.00
Orange County	36,254	Combination	6	\$9,832,898.00	.14	\$6,673,478.00	\$143,458,832.00
Rappahannock County	7348	Combination	8	\$1,247,586.00	.06-real estate .20-personal property	\$1,344,600.00	\$41,082,673.00
Stafford County	160,877	Combination	15	\$36,355,375.00	.015	\$9,121,885.00	\$413,549,874.00
Manassas (City)	42,708	Combination	2	\$15,230,000.00	.19	\$12,825,000.00	\$301,481,820.00
Culpeper County	53,596	Combination	9	\$2,447,977.00	.07	\$2,447,977.00	\$231,335,644.00

as well, there is a specific statute in Virginia that enables it along with the criteria for implementation. Absent a levy, the only other way to pay for this critical service is with regular budgetary dollars.

A levy is not a tax. A levy is earmarked specifically for the purpose it is assessed. Because essential services such as fire and EMS are so expensive but also critical to survival, these are funded this way. Once established, they will result in a saving for the residents in the way of reduced insurance premiums. The side benefit of these is that they save lives and property.

The ISO rating system is a key metric used to help insurance companies assess risk. The greater the risk, the higher the

casualty rates. The higher the ISO rating, the higher the insurance bill. The Abingdon Fire Department has an ISO rating of a 5 while the AFSD is a 5X. The properties within the AFSD realize significant insurance savings due to having AFD as their first-due but they do not pay for it. Each year, the Town requests money to help provide this service but the funding level has not increased in several years despite the costs of the service rising exponentially.

Selling fear is not my nature, nor my intent. The intent is to allow for the county to fund fire and EMS services properly so that these services can be available for our residents and guests. An example of this is from the county where I came from, we had a very large, planned development of more than 5,000 homes but they were an ISO-10. The homeowner's insurance for these homeowners was \$2,250 when it renewed after their ISO-10 was issued and their policy renewed.

Nicole Dooley, who lives in the Old Rice Retreat neighborhood in Cane Bay, said that when her home insurance came up for renewal this summer the premium soared from \$748 to \$2,250 because of the fire protection rating.

Dooley said she shopped the policy around, and found insurance with a different company for more than she had been paying, but far less than her new premium.

"I think it ended up around \$1,100," she said.

This type of increase is coming to SWVA for certain. As losses mount in the insurance industry, they are looking at every risk factor and charging for it. A levy issued by the county to fund these operations would let the county get ahead of these rate increases while also protecting our residents appropriately.

Virginia laws allow for contractual services for fire departments to provide services outside of their jurisdiction. The County uses this arrangement for EMS services in parts of the county. The residents of the Town have no legal obligation to underwrite the costs of providing fire services to the unincorporated parts of the county. Providing essential services to county residents is a financial responsibility of the county. To that end, the Town and Abingdon Fire Department will not be able to provide these services if suitable financial arrangements cannot be made.

We would like nothing more than to be properly funded so that we can build on the level of service that we provide. Many locals with deep roots in the fire services in Abingdon concur that we will need to have a full-time fire department at some point.

The call breakdown for the Abingdon Fire Department are:

Month	County Hours	Town Hours	% Calls in County	Total Hours	% Hours in County
22-Jul	553.5	173	57	726.5	76%
22-Aug	252	229	55	481	52%
22-Sep	242	84.5	67	326.5	74%
22-Oct	221.5	216	52	437.5	51%
22-Nov	262	242.5	39	504.5	52%
22-Dec	206.5	359	35	565.5	37%
23-Jan	208	166	59	374	56%
23-Feb	222	165	53	387	57%
23-Mar	477	276.5	63	753.5	63%
23-Apr	232.5	196.5	48	429	54%
23-May	222.2	267.5	46	489.7	45%
23-Jun	363.5	230.5	50	594	61%
Total	3463	2606	52% Average	6069	57%

The funding request from the Town of Abingdon to Washington County for FY 2024-2025 is:

- FY 2024-2025 County Funds will reimburse the Town of Abingdon for Fire Service Operations at 57% (3,463 hours) out of the 6,069 hours of responses in the County made outside the Town of Abingdon Corporation Limits for FY 2023.
- FY 2024-2025 anticipated budget expenses for Fire Service Operations by the Town of Abingdon, totals \$392,714.00. 57% of \$392,714.00 equals \$223,847.00
- The anticipated personnel expenses for FY 2024-2025 total \$560,385.00. 57% of the total personnel services including employee benefits total \$319,419.00.
- These funds will be used to protect 17,000 County residents and more than \$2,000,000,000.00 is assessed property value, in our first due area and surrounding areas.

Thank you for your consideration with this request. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Mike Cochran, Town Manager

CC: *Charlie Hargis, Board of Supervisors, Madison District*
Phil McCall, Board of Supervisors, Harrison District

Town of Abingdon:

Fire apparatus expenditures –

Based off of the published County budgets, since 1979, the County has given the Town \$540,000.00 to help purchase \$1,025,117.00 worth of apparatus and gave \$0.00 to help purchase an additional \$918,827.00 in vehicles that the Town purchased on their own.

1985 Ford FMC Fire Engine – Purchase price less than \$100,000.00

1986- \$20000.00

1987 - \$20000.00

1988 - \$10000.00

1995 Pierce Saber Fire Engine – Purchase Price \$175,000.00

1995 - \$40000.00

1996 - \$40000.00

1997 - \$40000.00

2003 E-One Tanker – Purchase price \$188,851.00

2004 – \$66667.00

2005 - \$66667.00

2006 - \$66666.00

2006 Pierce Dash 100' Aerial – Purchase price \$651,266.00

2006 - \$50000.00

2007 - \$50000.00

2008 - \$50000.00

2009 - \$20000.00

Also these apparatus were purchased with **NO** County dollars added;

1999 – Pierce Saber Fire Engine – Purchase price \$185,000.00

2001 Ford Brush Fire truck – Purchase price \$40,000.00

2016 Pierce Rescue Engine – Purchase price \$708,827.00

Also 3 Command vehicles, Utility pickup and training van for a combined total \$210,000.00

From: [Berry, Jason](#)
To: [Mike Cochran](#)
Cc: [Mike Rush](#); [Pennington, Randy](#); [Theresa Kingsley](#); [Berry, Jason](#); [Mayana Rice](#)
Subject: [External]FW: FY2025 Fire EMS Budgets
Date: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 2:58:52 PM
Attachments: [FY2025 Fire EMS Budgets.xlsx](#)
Importance: High

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Mike,

Good Afternoon! See the attached spreadsheet for my recommendation for all agencies running in the county & town. I used call data and an amount we could afford and spread across the agencies. You will see in total, there is \$300,000 new dollars.

Thanks,

Jason N. Berry
Washington County Administrator
276-525-1300

-----Original Message-----

From: Theresa Kingsley <tkingsley@washcova.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 2:29 PM
To: AAS Administration <contact@abingdonambulance.com>; Andrew Atkins (emt696@icloud.com) <emt696@icloud.com>; Anita Perry <anita.perry@balladhealth.org>; Bill Clark (bcsclark@embarqmail.com) <bcsclark@embarqmail.com>; bvfd2418@gmail.com; Christopher Lloyd-Turtle <chrislloyd.ras@gmail.com>; David Wolfe <dwolfewc16@gmail.com>; Don Venable <dongkvfd5@live.com>; Donald Wright <dmwright88@aol.com>; Freddy Lewis - Goodson Kinderhook FR (gkvfd6@hotmail.com) <gkvfd6@hotmail.com>; gkvfd36@gmail.com; Kenny Long (kennylong1957@gmail.com) <kennylong1957@gmail.com>; Mark McNew <adwise69@gmail.com>; Mark Wilkinson <mwilkinson@wclsc.com>; Marty Lewis (fflewiswc6@gmail.com) <fflewiswc6@gmail.com>; Michelle Grubb <mgrubb@washcova.com>; Mike Mason <mmason@wclsc.com>; Ross Hughes <gkvfd37@gmail.com>; Sharon Clark <damascusrescuesquad@yahoo.com>; WCFR (wcfstation100@hotmail.com) <wcfstation100@hotmail.com>; allenastridge8@gmail.com; Bill Nunley - Holston Investigations (bill.nunley@yahoo.com) <bill.nunley@yahoo.com>; Blake Turner <bturner@damascusvafire.org>; Britt White <mbrittwhite@gmail.com>; Clinch Mountain FD (2) <clinchmountainfd@outlook.com>; cwilliamsfire@comcast.net; Damascus FD <kturnerdpd@yahoo.com>; Derek Testerman (derek.testerman@bristolva.org) <derek.testerman@bristolva.org>; DFD5 <awidener72@yahoo.com>; Glade Spring FD 1 <jarren.strong@gmail.com>; Glade Spring FD 2 <rstumbo1@hotmail.com>; Glade Spring FD 3 Matt Jones <firescue24@yahoo.com>; Joe Wilson (clinchmtnfire@gmail.com) <clinchmtnfire@gmail.com>; Mark McCormick <mmccormick@abingdon-va.gov>; Meadowview FD <meadowview-fire@comcast.net>; Tim Estes <timestes@abingdon-va.gov>
Cc: Theresa Kingsley <tkingsley@washcova.com>; Berry, Jason <jberry@washcova.com>; Mike Rush <mrush@washcova.com>; Pennington, Randy <rpennington@washcova.com>
Subject: FY2025 Fire EMS Budgets
Importance: High

All, attached you will find Mr. Berry's budget recommendations for the EMS/Fire agencies for FY25.

Thanks,

Theresa D. Kingsley-Varble
Emergency Management Coordinator
Washington County, Virginia
1 Government Center Place, Suite A
Abingdon, VA 24210
(276)525-1330 office

U.S. Fire Administration/National Fire Data Center

Structure Fire Response Times

Topical Fire Research Series, Volume 5 – Issue 7

January 2006 / Revised August 2006



Homeland
Security



Structure Fire Response Times

January 2006 / Revised August 2006

Volume 5, Issue 7

Findings

- Regardless of region, season, or time of day, structure fire response times are generally less than 5 minutes half the time.
- The nationwide 90th percentile response time to structure fires is less than 11 minutes.
- Structure fires in the Northeast have the lowest response times while those in the West have the highest.
- Average structure fire response times show a relationship between flame spread and longer response times, but only after flames have spread beyond the room of origin.

DEFINITION OF RESPONSE TIME

The definition of “response time” depends on the perspective from which one approaches the data. In the fire service, “total” response time is usually measured from the time a call is received by the emergency communications center to the arrival of the first apparatus at the scene. For the public, the clock for response time begins when the public becomes aware there is an emergency incident occurring and the fire department is notified. In reality, however, the response time clock for fire suppression begins at the moment of fire ignition and continues until the fire is extinguished.

RESPONSE TIME COMPONENTS

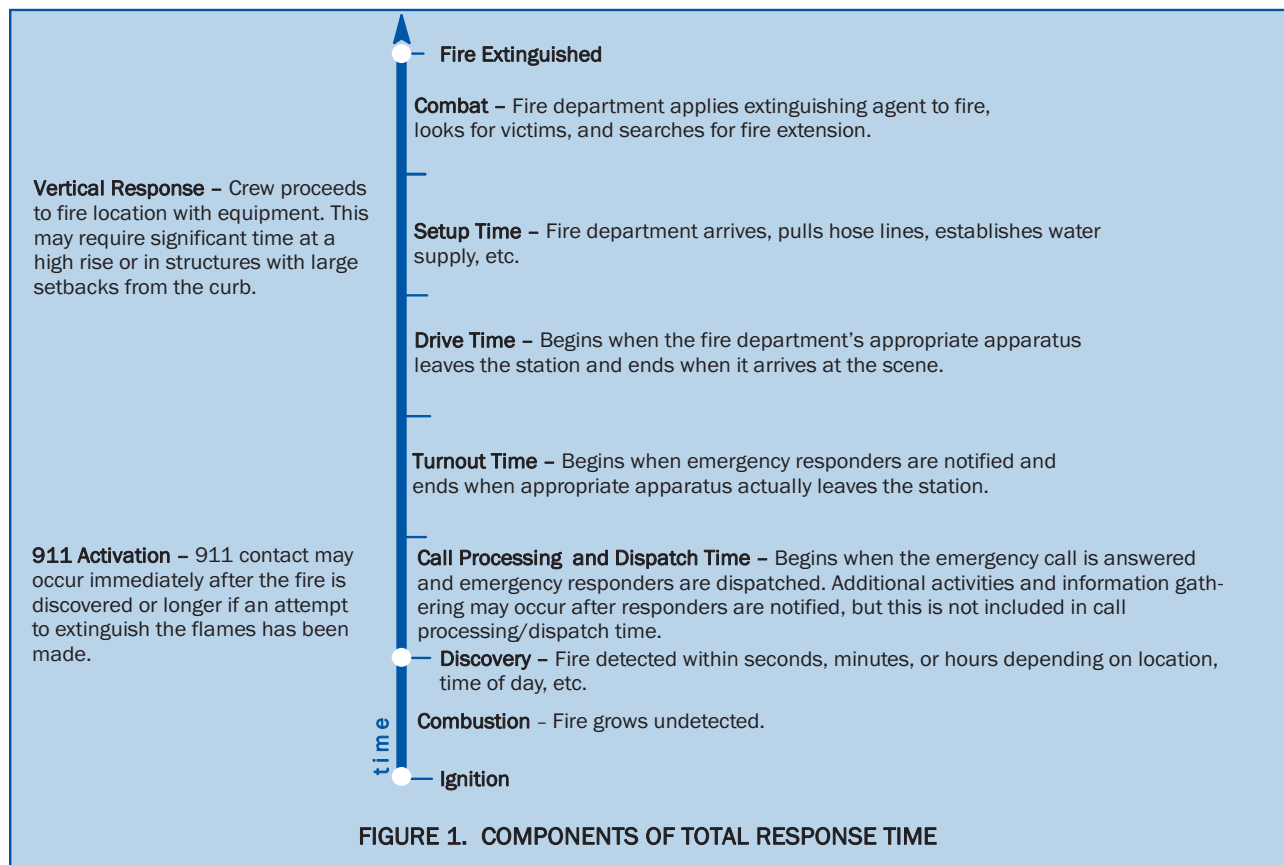
Response time components include ignition, combustion, discovery, 911 activation,¹ call processing and dispatch, turnout time, drive time, setup time, “vertical” response, combat, and extinguishment (Figure 1).

Fire ignition occurs when oxygen, fuel, and heat combine to produce flame. Combustion is a self-sustaining chemical reaction yielding energy or products that cause further reactions of the same kind.² Depending on the available fuel load and other conditions, a fire may grow undetected for some time prior to being detected. Discovery or detection occurs when someone becomes aware of the fire and takes steps to mitigate the situation (e.g., calls the fire department, uses a fire extinguisher). Depending on whether or not one tries to extinguish the fire, 911 activation may occur several minutes after the fire is detected. In the case of an incendiary or suspicious fire (or other criminal firesetting act), this activation might be postponed deliberately.

Once 911 has been activated, *call processing and dispatch* is the time it takes for the 911 operator to ascertain the location and type of incident and alert the appropriate emergency service providers to the emergency.

Turnout time is measured from the time the alarm is received by firefighting personnel to the time the appropriate apparatus begins its actual driving response to the scene. Turnout time comprises getting to the station (in most volunteer organizations), donning protective gear, and other preparatory activities.

Drive time is the time it takes to drive from the fire station (or location that received the alarm) to curbside of the address of the incident.



Setup time begins once a fire engine or other apparatus arrives on the scene and ends after personnel established a water supply, set up necessary equipment, etc. Additional time may be required if the structure is set far back from the curb or in a high-rise where a vertical response is required.

Once equipment and personnel are on the scene and setup is completed, combat time is the period of time required to completely extinguish the fire.

METHODOLOGY

National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) 5.0 data for 2001 and 2002 were used. If no arrival time was included or if response time appeared to exceed 24 hours, the incident was excluded. Only 0.14% of incidents recorded a response time of more than 24 hours; as such, these were considered as outliers and omitted from the analysis. Incidents classified as automatic or mutual aid were also excluded to avoid double counting. With the exception of flame spread, trends included all structure fires (incident type codes 110 through 123). Only fires with flame spread (incident type codes 110 through 112 and 120 through 123) were included in the analysis of response times related to flame spread.

Data for this study were queried in whole minutes. This means that response times of exactly 4 minutes and those up to 4 minutes and 59 seconds are all included in the 4-minute category. As such, slight differences between 3 minutes, 4 minutes, or 5 minutes are not as substantial as when data are examined more closely (i.e., including the seconds). References to the x-minute range mean everything from x minutes to x minutes and 59 seconds while “less than x minutes” means everything from zero to 1 second below x minutes.

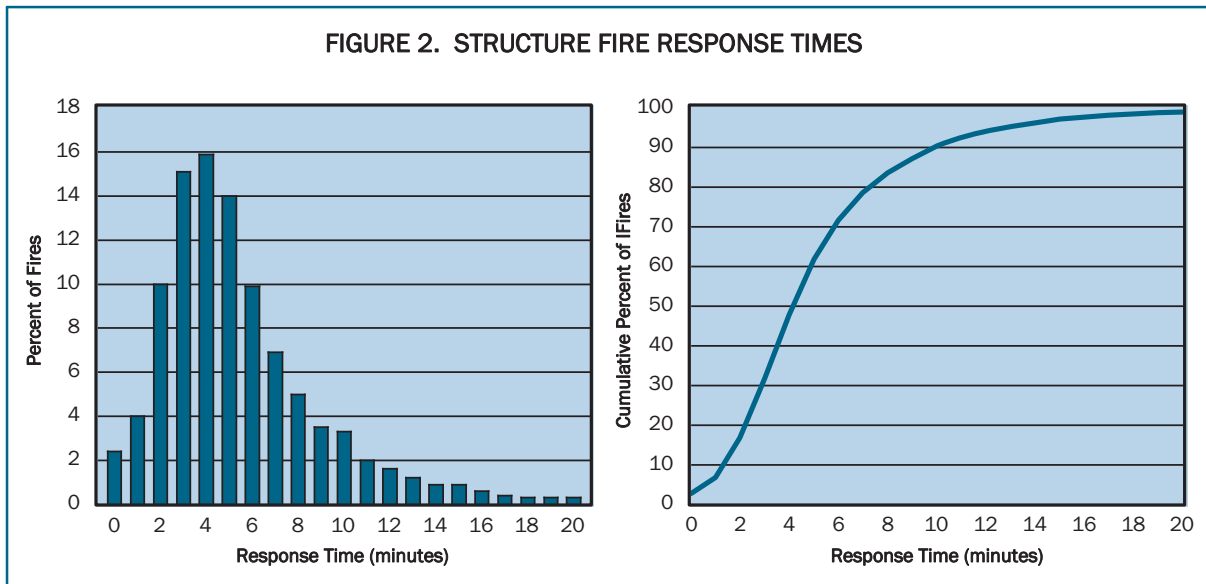
Because the vast majority of response times are 20 minutes or less (98.7%), the charts and graphs in this paper do not reflect response times more than 20 minutes.

Several caveats need to be kept in mind with respect to response times. First, they are subject to a variety of measurement errors when units report their arrival on scene prematurely or belatedly. Second, response times are frequently not comparable across fire-rescue systems because of the differing manners in which they are calculated. Also, it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure some components of response time.

Response times here are measured from alarm time to arrival on scene, but there is uncertainty in the data. NFIRS 5.0 defines alarm time as “when the alarm was received by the fire department.” This definition is vague and subjective. Some departments may read this definition to mean when the notification comes into the 911 communications center (911 activation) while others may read it as when the notification comes into the station (dispatch time). Thus, depending on the interpretation by the department, response times reported to NFIRS may or may not include call processing and dispatch time, which could typically take between 30 and 120 seconds.

GENERAL TRENDS

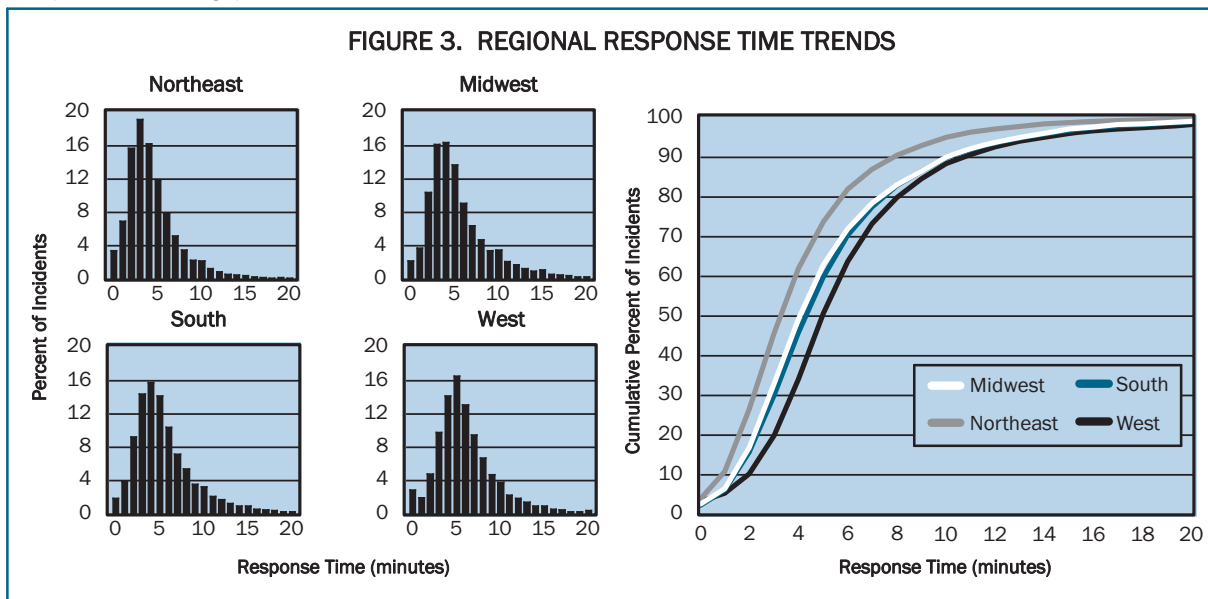
As shown in Figure 2, the highest percentage (16%) of structure fires had a response time in the 4-minute range. The percent of structure fires with response times of 3 and 5 minutes were not far behind at 15% and 14%, respectively. Overall, 61% of structure fires in 2001 and 2002 had a response time of less than 6 minutes.



REGIONAL TRENDS

Regional variation in response time was observed (Figure 3). As the regions move from the Northeast to the West, the percent of structure fires with a response time of less than 5 minutes decreases. The regional differences may be due to population densities. Usually as population densities increase, fire stations are situated so that they cover less and less geographic area, which may contribute to reduced response times. However, more investigation is needed as there is also variability within the regions.³

The peak in response time (minute range with the highest percentage) also moves from lower (3-minute range) to higher (5-minute range) as we move from the Northeast to the West.



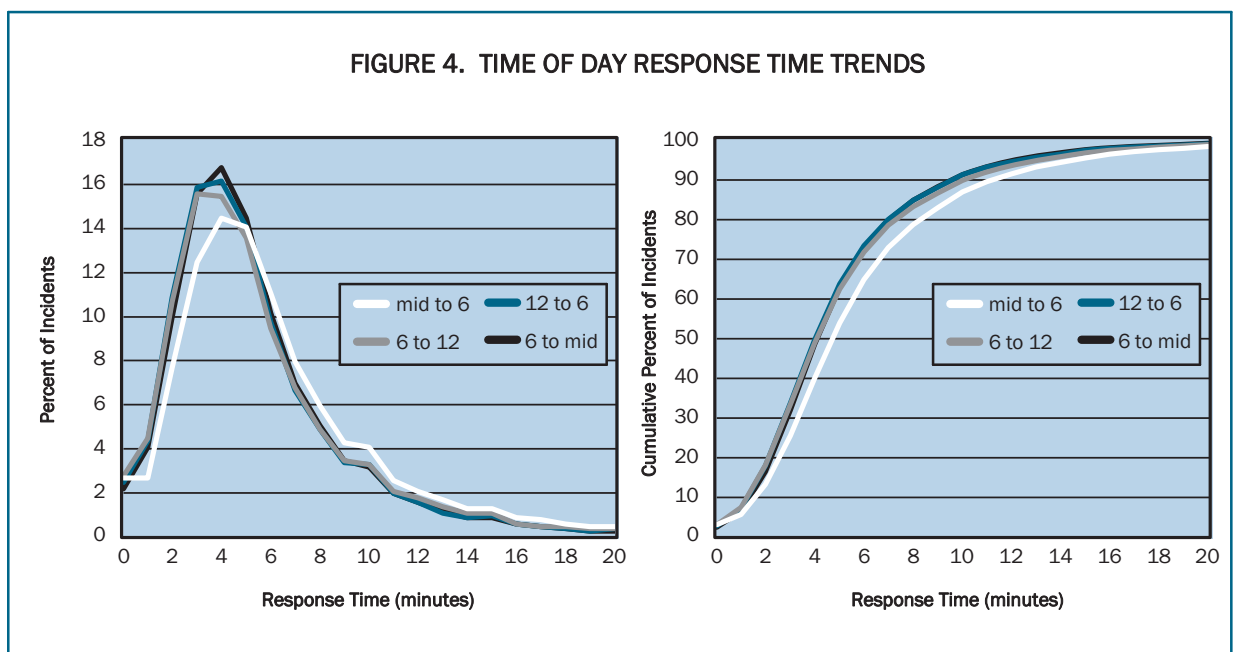
SEASONAL TRENDS⁴

Although the number of fires fluctuates depending on the season, response times to structure fires in 2001 and 2002 were similar throughout the year and are virtually indistinguishable from the national trends shown in Figure 2. Each season, response times peak with 15% to 16% having a response time in the 4-minute range. Throughout the year, about half of fires have response times of less than 5 minutes. Winter has the lowest percentage of calls with a response time of less than 5 minutes (46%). Spring and summer have the highest percentage of calls with a response time of less than 5 minutes (48% each).

TIME OF DAY TRENDS

Regardless of time of day, response times to structure fires peaked at the 4-minute range (Figure 4); however, more fires have a 4-minute range response time between 6 p.m. and midnight (17%) than any other time of day. Between midnight and 6 a.m., only 14% of fires had a response time in the 4-minute range. These results were expected because firefighters—both career and volunteer—tend to be asleep between midnight and 6 a.m. In addition, it is more difficult to see at night and just after awakening, which results in driving more slowly.

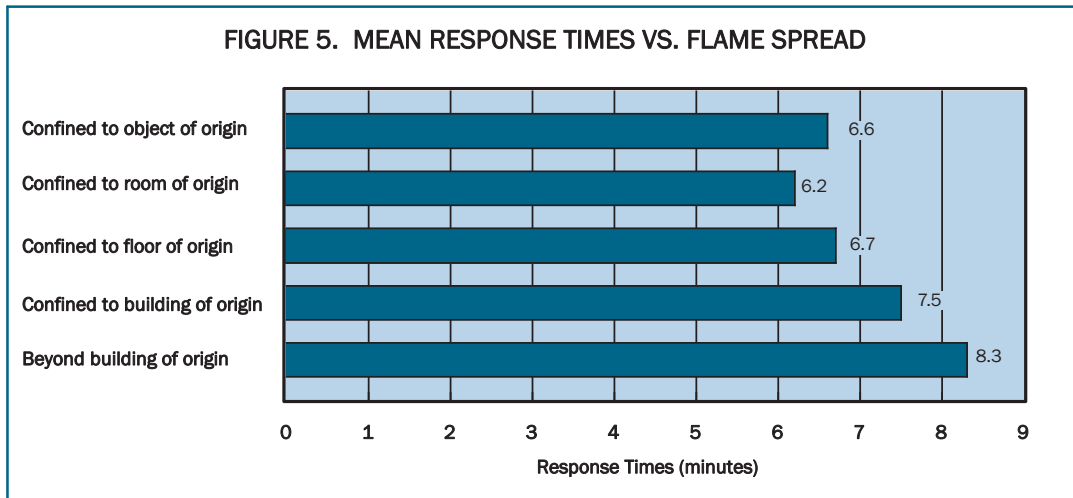
Fires have a better chance of having a response time of less than 5 minutes between noon and 6 p.m. (49%). Only 40% had a response time of less than 5 minutes between midnight and 6 a.m.



FLAME SPREAD AND RESPONSE TIME

The fire service is primarily concerned with how response time impacts flame spread. About half of structure fires confined to the room of origin (51%) and confined to the floor of origin (51%) had a response time of less than 5 minutes. More than half of fires confined to the building of origin (54%) and nearly half of fires beyond the building of origin (49%) had a response time of less than 6 minutes.

Figure 5 shows that the mean response time was lowest for fires confined to the room of origin (less than 7 minutes) while fires that spread beyond the building of origin have the highest mean response time (less than 9 minutes).



CONCLUSION

Despite the differences in time of day, season, or location in the country, there is not a great difference in response times to structure fires as analyzed here. A more detailed analysis may uncover larger differences.

In most of the analyses done here, response times were less than 5 minutes nearly 50% of the time and less than 8 minutes about 75% of the time. Nationally, average response times were generally less than 8 minutes. The overall 90th percentile, a level often cited in the industry, was less than 11 minutes. How much current response times have been impacted by industry standards and fire department goals is not clear.

To request additional information or comment on this report, visit
<http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/applications/feedback>

Notes:

1. Approximately 96% of the geographic United States is covered by some type of 911. *National Emergency Number Association.*
2. *Essentials of Fire Fighting, Fourth Edition, 2001.*
3. The regions of the United States are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as the *Northeast* (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont); *South* (Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia); *Midwest* (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin); *West* (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming).
4. For purposes of this analysis, the seasons are defined as winter: January–March; spring: April–June; summer: July–September; fall: October–December.

**ASSESSING WASHINGTON COUNTY'S USE
OF ITS 1988 FIRE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Washington County Fire Services Study Committee

Virginia Fire Services Board

May 1989

ASSESSING WASHINGTON COUNTY'S USE
OF ITS 1988 FIRE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The executive summary is made up of the recommendations in the report. Each recommendation in the summary shows the page of the report on which it appears. As mentioned in the Foreword the recommendations from the 1988 report are repeated in this report. They are in italics. The recommendations coming out of this present report (1998) are underlined and in bold type in the body of the report..

RECOMMENDATION 98-1

The recommendation made in the 1988 report remains valid and it is recommended that the reviews of the Association's By-laws be made at regular intervals and updates be made to meet the changing needs of the Association and its member departments. (Pg. 4)

RECOMMENDATION 98-2

It is recommended that a clear concise document setting forth the relationships between the Association, the County Administration and the Board of Supervisors be developed and executed by all parties to the agreement. (Pg.5)

RECOMMENDATION 98-3

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors with the advise and counsel of the County Fire Association establish a committee of emergency service providers for the purpose of developing a plan for upgrading the county's emergency radio communications system. (Pg. 6)

RECOMMENDATION 98-4

It is recommended that the County Fire Association develop a County wide Incident Command System to be used by all companies on all incidents. (Pg. 7)

RECOMMENDATION 98-5

It is recommended that the Association continue setting goals and objectives for the improvement and advancement of fire protection in the County. (Pg.8)

RECOMMENDATION 98-6

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors and County Administration take necessary action to assure full and complete cooperation between the Office of the Coordinator of Emergency Services and the Association. (Pg. 9)

RECOMMENDATION 98-7

It is recommended that the 911/CAD system be upgraded by entering information into the system showing what fire companies and what special pieces of equipment, if pertinent, are to be dispatched to each address in the County. (Pg. 9)

RECOMMENDATION 98-8

It is recommended that all outdated non-standard personal protective clothing be discarded. (Pg. 10)

RECOMMENDATION 98-9

It is recommended that the Association assess its member companies' attitude toward coordinated training and do whatever is in its power to assure that such an approach is used. (Pg. 10)

RECOMMENDATION 98-10

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association take whatever steps are necessary to institute negotiations with the City of Bristol for using the city's fire training facility. (Pg. 11)

RECOMMENDATION 98-11

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/ County Fire Association assure that all specifications for fire apparatus to be purchased with county funds conform with the requirements of NFPA 1901 - Standard for Automotive Apparatus and that the specifications do not include items which are not necessary for efficient and effective fire fighting. In the event any company wants items over and above those needed to meet the NFPA standard or are not necessary for efficient and effective fire fighting purposes then that company should be required to pay for such items out of its own funds or the

items should be removed from the specifications. (Pg. 14)

RECOMMENDATION 98-12

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association require a full and complete accounting of all county funds used to purchase fire apparatus be submitted to the Board of Supervisors upon completion of purchase and if the amount of funds authorized by the Board of Supervisors is greater than the amount spent the difference be returned to the County. (Pg. 14)

RECOMMENDATION 98-13

It is recommended that commencing with the next rotation of funds from the County that the funds can be used only for the purchase of: pumpers, tankers or pumper/tankers, and brush trucks. (Pg. 15)

RECOMMENDATION 98-14

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association establish the numbers and types of apparatus that each company should have to assure effective and efficient fire protection and that these will be the only pieces of apparatus subject to county support. (Pg. 15)

RECOMMENDATION 98-15

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association review the practice of companies purchasing new apparatus and retaining the supposedly replaced piece in their fleet.(Pg. 15)

RECOMMENDATION 98-16

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association consider developing a practice whereby replaced pieces of apparatus, in better condition than other pieces of apparatus elsewhere in the county, be used to replace the poorer condition apparatus. This is of particular importance as apparatus purchased with county funds begins to age. (Pg. 15)

RECOMMENDATION 98-17

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association adopt a policy providing for the transfer, between companies, of low mileage apparatus to replace high

mileage apparatus. (Pg. 15)

RECOMMENDATION 98-18

It is recommended that in the future when apparatus purchased with county funds are replaced with new apparatus and sold that the funds received as a result of the sale be returned to the county. (Pg. 15)

RECOMMENDATION 98-19

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/Fire Association consider whether to continue the nine year rotation schedule for purchasing fire apparatus or whether some other time frame be considered. It is further recommended that consideration be given to developing some criteria, other than age, to be used for deciding when apparatus should be replaced. As part of this, consideration ought to be given to other needs for which county funds might be better used for improving fire protections services. (Pg. 16)

RECOMMENDATION 98-20

It is recommended that each pumper and tanker in service in the County which is or may be used in a fire suppression operation be equipped IMMEDIATELY with Self Contained Breathing Apparatus as specified in NFPA 1901 - Standard for Automotive Apparatus. Note the emphasis on "immediately" in the recommendation. This goes to the safety of personnel and meeting safety standards should take precedence over all other considerations. (Pg. 17)

RECOMMENDATION 98-21

It is recommended that the Association develop a dispatch procedure establishing an automatic multi-company response dispatch for specified types of incidents. (Pg. 19)

RECOMMENDATION 98-22

It is recommended that the Association establish a process which will result in entering in the 911 computer aided dispatch system specifying the companies and any special pieces of equipment to be dispatched to every address in the system. (Pg. 19)

RECOMMENDATION 98-23

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association require every company in the county to participate in the VFIRS system. (Pg. 22)

RECOMMENDATION 98-24

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association clearly define the issues they want addressed and develop a process by which these issues can be dealt with. (Pg.27)

ASSESSING WASHINGTON COUNTY'S USE
OF ITS 1988 FIRE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

FOREWORD

This report is in response to a request from the Washington County Board of Supervisors to the Virginia Fire Services Board for a follow up study of a report prepared in 1988 by the Department of Fire Programs. The Fire Services Board established a committee to do the study. During the course of its work and after consultation with representatives of the Washington County Fire Association it was concluded there was no need to repeat the 1988 study but rather use the 1988 study recommendations as a base and review actions taken on recommendations made in that report.

Methodology used in preparing the report

The first step was for the Committee to meet with representatives of the Washington County Fire Association at which time the Association delivered data and information updating many of the charts contained in the 1988 report.

Following the original meeting a survey team of the Committee, consisting of two members, spent a day and a half in Washington County with two representatives of the Association. Every fire station in the county was visited and time was spent interviewing each chief or his designee. Condition of equipment and stations were the main topics of discussion along with other issues such as training and member response activity. The Emergency Communications 911 Coordinator and a Communications Supervisor for purposes of learning dispatching and communications procedures and protocols.

A preliminary report was drafted and reviewed by the study committee. This preliminary report was mainly a summary and review of the data, material, and information gathered from the sources mentioned above. In its preparation additional information needs were identified and requested within the body of the report. After Committee review it was sent to the Washington County Fire Association for review and comment. Two purposes were to be served by this. One was for the Association to identify any data or information errors or omissions and provide corrections. The second purpose was to have the Association provide additional information requested in the report.

After the above was completed a draft final report was prepared. It was reviewed by the

Committee and sent to the Association for its review and comments. In its original form the draft report contained suggestions the Board of Supervisors and/or the Association might consider for future action to consolidate gains made since 1988. The Association's response was that the report should be re-written and rather than being in terms of suggestions it present solid recommendations. This was not difficult to do and is so done in this, its final version.

During this review step two new issues were injected into the process. However, the nature of the issues are such that they could not be made a part of this report without a considerable amount of additional time and work. This will be discussed in detail in the report.

One issue needs to be mentioned at the outset because it was the primary motivation for the follow up study request. However, during the second step site visit by the study team the concern was resolved and was removed as an issue.

The question was whether the county should purchase a ladder truck and station it at Washington County VFD # 1. This was discussed in detail with the Chief of Washington County Volunteer Fire Department # 1 and the team was assured that a ladder truck was not what his department needed or wanted. The most pressing need for apparatus at that station is a replacement pumper for one that is in marginal condition. On that same point the Abingdon Volunteer Fire Department obtained a ladder since the 1988 study. The study team is advised that the ladder truck is available for county use at any time it is requested or fits into a response pre-plan. Based on these facts there is no need for another ladder truck in Washington County.

Report Format

The format of the report is to address each recommendation in the 1988 report in the order in which they appeared in that report. Each 1988 recommendation is repeated as presented in 1988. They are easily identified as each is typed in italics and preceded by the word "recommendation # -- " in underlined capital letters.

Following the 1988 recommendation is a discussion of the status of that recommendation giving an assessment of action taken or not taken. Where it is important and necessary a discussion of future actions that ought to be taken is included. This usually results in a recommendation to the County Board of Supervisor, or the Board of Directors of the County Fire Association, or in some instances both bodies. These recommendations are also easily recognized in that they are presented in underlined bold type. For reference purposes they are identified as "Recommendation 98 - #".

There is a brief summary which emphasizes some of the more important points made in the report.

The final portion is an addendum which comments on the two issues which were injected in the report during the final review step. It explains why the issues could not be addressed in the

context of the present report and how they ought to be addressed.

ASSESSING WASHINGTON COUNTY'S USE
OF ITS 1988 FIRE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION # 1

The Washington County Volunteer Fireman's Association and the fire companies in Washington County should, from time to time, review their operations and the charter, constitution and by-laws under which they operate.

The study team is advised that the by-laws of the Association and individual departments are reviewed from time to time and revised as needed. According to information received the last revision to the Association's By-laws was in November 1993. This does not mean there hasn't been a subsequent review at which no revisions were made but there is nothing to indicate this has happened.

RECOMMENDATION 98-1

The recommendation made in the 1988 report remains valid and it is recommended that the reviews of the Association's By-laws be made at regular intervals and updates be made to meet the changing needs of the Association and its member departments.

RECOMMENDATION # 2

It is recommended that The Board of Supervisors and the County Administration consider whether a more formal and official relationship should be established between them.

There is evidence supporting the fact that there is a good relationship between the county fire organizations, the Association and the Board of Supervisors. It seems that the credibility level between and among these groups has improved. The best evidence of this is the manner in which the Board of Supervisors deals with the issue of fire apparatus purchasing and replacement.

Information on hand is that there is a letter on file which resulted from this recommendation.

This is a fairly recent action but from a review of material it was underway for sometime.

While writing such letters may be viewed as “bureaucratic” there are good reasons for it.

One important reason is the frequent changing of office holders as time passes. County Administrators come and go, elected officials - government and organization - choose not to run, are not re-elected, or, in some organizations, are barred from succeeding themselves. When this happens there is a loss of institutional memory about what the relationships were and what their purpose was. New actors may have new thoughts on what should be. The reasons for or interpretation of the relationship arrangements are recorded as “history” contained in a written document.

If properly worded, a document, while not negating the need for continuing discussion and interpretation of relationships can certainly reduce it.

Another important reason for having these understanding and recording them in writing is that it can provide a “safety valve” for county officials, elected or appointed. It gives them a stronger hand in referring questions and issues back to the to the Association and can be a very effective control for “end runs” around the Association.

There are examples of such agreements available in localities around Virginia. They can be obtained and used as models in Washington County.

RECOMMENDATION 98-2

It is recommended that a clear, concise document setting forth the relationships between the Association, the County Administration and the Board of Supervisors be developed and executed by all parties to the agreement.

RECOMMENDATION # 3

It is recommended that the Washington County Volunteer Firemen's Association examine that part of its purpose statement which reads “to coordinate the work of its members” and develop a better working understanding of what this is meant to accomplish.

Improvements have been made in this area since the 1987 report. Work has been done on dealing with a number of “coordination” issues. Among them are “first run” matters, fund raising boundaries and related concerns, and radio communication problems.

“Coordination” is a never ending consideration. Like “management and leadership communication” it always needs work and attention. From information reviewed the Association and its member organizations have a better realization of this than was apparent in 1987 and actions have been taken along these lines.

An example of enhanced coordination, since the last report, is the work and accomplishments, in the operational area of radio communications. A dispatch Standard Operating Procedure has been adopted. The need for single channel and central on scene command post is recognized and is being dealt with.

There are still some problems which need attention. They are not unrecognized by some but they are of a nature that time and work needs to be done on them. Some of them need money for solution. Others need training, education, and motivation.

The one that needs money is the radio system. There is still a combination of low band and high band frequencies used by the various county emergency response organizations. The only solution to this is to continue upgrading the radio system until a fully integrated emergency response communications system is achieved. As long as this division exists in the emergency radio communications system there will be difficulty in coordinating on-scene operations. It is not that ways of dealing with the different radio bands cannot be developed, however, having various organizations and even units within the same organization on different bands makes it much more difficult and more prone to breakdowns, not only in equipment and technical matters but in human ways. Good communications is central to good operations.

RECOMMENDATION 98-3

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors with the advise and counsel of the County Fire Association establish a committee of emergency service providers for the purpose of developing a plan for upgrading the county's emergency radio communications system.

There are areas of coordination in operations that need attention. One of the foremost is that of dealing with the policies governing which companies are dispatched to calls and how "mutual aid" works. During its on-site visit the study team noted during conversations at various stations that the term "mutual aid" was used. These were statements to the effect that some departments have agreements with other departments to respond, automatically, to some calls. However, the team's perception at this point is that the dispatching procedure for the most part is to dispatch only the company in whose area the call originates. If upon arrival the responding company has need for additional equipment it requests that other departments be dispatched. This is "mutual aid" in the traditional fire service sense. It is not "automatic mutual response" in terms of a pre-planned system of alerting and dispatching multiple departments to certain types of emergency situations. More will be said later when the 911 system is discussed. It has another drawback in that it puts a burden on the dispatchers to keep up with numerous "mutual aid" agreements. Whereas, if the county had one standard procedure for fire apparatus dispatching this would be avoided.

A second area of coordination has to do with on-scene command and control. Individual companies allude to using "incident command" techniques. However, a county wide incident command system is not used. Experience, nationwide, among small and large departments, paid

and volunteer, show the advantage and importance of such a technique. "Incident command" is not a complicated process. Its "complication" is that it is new and it is change. And change is sometimes difficult to bring about. The design of the incident command system permits its use in small one-department incidents or large multi-organization incidents. It is designed to grow as the incident grows and to be reduced as the incident winds down. What is most important is that everyone does everything according to the same process.

The concept of "unified incident command" has gained enough attention that the General Assembly has expressed its concern for such a system being examined for use when state agencies must work together at various emergency incidents.

RECOMMENDATION 98-4

It is recommended that the County Fire Association develop a County wide Incident Command System to be used by all companies on all incidents.

RECOMMENDATION # 4

It is recommended that the Washington County Fireman's Association develop a long range plan setting forth the goals and objectives it would like to achieve in some set period of time over a number of years.

RECOMMENDATION # 5

It is recommended that the Washington County Fireman's Association develop a short range plan setting forth the goals and objectives it would like to achieve over a shorter span of time than set in recommendation # 4.

The county fire service adopted the recommendations of the 1987 plan and used that as a guide for their planning and for setting goals and objectives.

According to the Association short range goals are set in January of each year and actions are initiated to meet those goals. Providing training and increasing participation in training is a yearly goal. Another goal was to develop an Infectious Disease Program.

The rotation plan used by the county for purchasing fire apparatus is a "long range" planning process as it establishes the order in which companies will purchase fire apparatus over years.

There is a long range goal of moving the fire service radio to a high band system.

As is the case in many of the recommendations contained in the 1987 this is a recommendation that requires on-going work. It is a 'guiding' recommendation for actions to be taken. As such it should be returned to regularly and judgements made about whether it continues to be followed.

RECOMMENDATION 98-5

It is recommended that the Association continue setting goals and objectives for the improvement and advancement of fire protection in the County.

RECOMMENDATION # 6

It is recommended that the Association work with the County Administrator to develop some arrangement where there will be an administration staff member who can act as liaison between the Administrator, the fire companies and the Association.

Liaison between the Association and county officials is reported to be accomplished by having the President of the Association as the official Association liaison person to county officials. The Emergency Services Director, a member of the County Board of Supervisors, is county liaison to the Association (This was changed in January 1988. The County Administrator is now the Emergency Services Director). In addition, there is a county administration staff member who is in a liaison position between the Association and the Board of Supervisors.

This is a cumbersome arrangement. There are too many points of contact and too many different routes in lines of communication.

Increasingly, throughout the state, counties are assigning fire and rescue liaison responsibilities to the county employee having the responsibility of coordinating emergency service whether that employee has the official title of Coordinator of Emergency Services or some other title. The logic of this arrangement is evident and should not need any further justification. This is not the case in Washington County.

Coordinators of emergency services have the duty and responsibility for preparing emergency response and recovery plans and activities. Acceptable or not to the fire companies they fall within the purview of that authority.

In addition the Coordinator of Emergency Services is the county's 911 coordinator. Although not in charge of the emergency communications center being the 911 system coordinator puts the Office of the Coordinator of Emergency Services in the position of providing the fire companies assistance through the computer aided dispatch system which is an integral part of the 911 system.

It is also the responsibility of the Office of the Coordinator of Emergency Services to maintain the county's computer generated mapping system.

The above factors make it imperative for the Fire Association and the Office of the Coordinator work together. The responsibilities of this office and the technology of the various included systems are there for the main purpose of providing maximum service to the citizens of

Washington County and steps need to be taken to assure this occurs. This is an organizational and delivery of services issue and must be handled as such.

RECOMMENDATION 98-6

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors and County Administration take necessary action to assure full and complete cooperation between the Office of the Coordinator of Emergency Services and the Association.

According to information provided the study team there is space available in the 911/CAD system which would permit recording fire company and apparatus assignments for every location in the county. While this would take time and effort the resulting efficiencies, particularly for the dispatchers, will be well worth the effort. Further, it is important that dispatchers be involved in this activity. A good practice for the Association would be to make sure that dispatchers are represented on any group or committee working on matters affecting them in any way.

RECOMMENDATION 98-7

It is recommended that the 911/CAD system be upgraded by entering information into the system showing what fire companies and what special pieces of equipment, if pertinent, are to be dispatched to each address in the County.

RECOMMENDATION # 7

The Washington County Volunteer Fireman's Association should direct some attention to making sure it can maintain a sufficient level of members in the fire companies in the county.

The study team did not detect any problem with the number of members in fire departments. Each company uses its own approach to recruiting members. There were still some comments about periodic problems with low response numbers particularly during daytime calls but nothing was said indicating this was a serious problem. If there is need for additional personnel at an incident the next closest department is requested.

RECOMMENDATION # 8

It is recommended that the fire companies begin to take the steps necessary to get sufficient items of NFPA standard protective clothing.

In 1987 this recommendation was made because of the state of protective clothing in relation to OSHA standards. In 1997 according to the data submitted to the study team there is improvement in this area. An examination of the data submitted to the study team shows that with only one exception this recommendation has been met. That exception is one company

which does not have enough hoods for each of its active member. Four report having non-standard helmets and one reports having excess non-standard turnout pants and coats in their inventory. Actually these items should be disposed of so there is no temptation to use them.

RECOMMENDATION 98-8

It is recommended that all outdated non-standard personal protective clothing be discarded.

RECOMMENDATION # 9

It is recommended that the Fireman's Association develop a coordinated approach to training for the county.

The response received in answer to this recommendation is that all training for Washington County is requested by the Washington County Firefighter's Association. When training is offered in the county each session is hosted by a different department. This is done to put some equity into the travel situation.

Some departments pay instructors to conduct training in the department so members do not have to go outside of their department to attend training. This has merit from the standpoint from which it is presented. While companies are to be commended for taking on the financial obligation of paying for in-company training, this approach tends to foster isolation and does not foster the coordination, communications, and teamwork needed to prepare for operating at multi-company incidents.

There is also a training program at the community college funded by the Board of Supervisors. This is advanced fire science and is not supposed to duplicate Department of Fire Programs certification levels of fire fighting training.

In spite of representations to the contrary there still seems to be some "go it alone" training on the part of some companies. The Association should take whatever steps necessary to assure that all training in the county is offered on a coordinated cooperative basis.

RECOMMENDATION 98-9

It is recommended that the Association assess its member companies's attitude toward coordinated training and do whatever is in its power to assure that such an approach is used.

RECOMMENDATION # 10

It is recommended that the Firemen Association and the county administration develop a plan to establish a regional training center in the county.

It is recognized by the Association that building a training center is a fairly expensive endeavor. There is a training center in Bristol. It would be to the county's advantage to make use of this facility rather than establish one of its own. This might take considerable negotiation but in the final analysis it will probably provide better training opportunities than building and trying to maintain a separate one in Washington County. An approach of this type takes considerable negotiation and patience..

RECOMMENDATION 98-10

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association take whatever steps are necessary to institute negotiations with the City of Bristol for using the city's fire training facility.

RECOMMENDATION # 11

It is recommended that the Firemen's Association work with the Department of Fire Programs to help dispel the misconceptions that prevail in the county fire service about state certification and fire fighter training.

This was an issue in 1987 that grew out of a change in titles for training programs. Over time, with patience and understanding by both the Association and the Department of Fire Programs's Area Managers this problem seems to have corrected itself. Re-locating the DFP area office may also have had a positive effect on this. Whatever the reason the situation has been corrected and is no longer an issue.

RECOMMENDATION # 12

It is recommended that the Firemen Association encourage and support the development of the training which has been proposed by Mr. Fletcher and which he worked on with the previous county administrator.

This issue is now an internal matter. It is one method of delivering fire fighter training to members of companies in the county and is supported by funds from the Board of Supervisors. It was commented on in remarks under Recommendation # 9.

RECOMMENDATION # 13

It is recommended that the apparatus replacement program being used in Washington County be continued and that the management aspect of the program be strengthened. This recommendation is meant to include fire fighting equipment in addition to apparatus so the principles which apply to one apply to both.

This was a key recommendation in view of the number of pieces of apparatus in the county. It is still an important one, more so now, with the way the county is dealing with purchase of equipment.

It is the study teams understanding that since the 1987 report the Board of Supervisors started a program of allocating a sum of money every three years which is to be used by each of three companies to purchase a piece of fire apparatus. The money is distributed to the fire departments in the county according to an order of distribution determined by the Washington County Firefighters Association. This started out at \$180,000 and has increased to \$345,000.

The following chart gives a history of how funds have been spent since the program started. In distributing funds the Association adopted the term "rotation". One rotation is when all companies have received their allocation. With nine companies in Washington County one "rotation" takes nine years. In addition to apparatus purchased for Washington County departments the first "rotation" included funds for Mt. Rogers Volunteer Fire Department (Grayson County) which with Washington County's consent has a satellite station at Konnarock in Washington County. There is an issue involved in this which will be commented on later.

FIRST ROTATION

Department	Apparatus purchased	Cost	Status of Purchased Apparatus	Disposition of Apparatus Replaced
Abingdon	1985 Pumper	\$ 69,000	Added to fleet	Left in service
Clinch Mt	1987 Pumper-Tanker	74,000	Added to fleet	Left in service
Brumley Gap	1987 Mini-pumper	70,000	Added to fleet	Left in service
Damascus	Crash truck	125,585	Replaced truck	Sold
Glade Springs	1992 Pumper	141,000	Replaced truck	Left in service
Goodson-Kind	1985 Pumper	70,000	Replaced truck	Sold
Green Springs	1987 Pumper-Tanker	89,000	Added to fleet	Left in service
Meadowview	1985 Pumper-Tanker	85,500	Replaced truck	Sold
Washington	1992 Pumper	160,000	Added to fleet	Left in service
Mt. Rogers	1992 Pumper	118,000	Added to fleet	Moved to Konnarock station
		\$1,002,085		

SECOND ROTATION

Abingdon	1995 Pumper	\$ 180,300	Added to fleet	Left in service
Clinch Mt	1997 Pumper-Tanker	156,000	Added to fleet	Left in service
Brumley Gap	1997 Pumper	146,000	Replaced truck	For Sale
Damascus*	-----	-----	-----	-----
Glade Spring*	-----	-----	-----	-----
Goodson Kind	1995 Pumper	197,000	Replaced truck	Sold
Green Spring	1997 Pumper-Tanker	205,000	Added to fleet	Left in service
Meadowview	1995 Pumper-Tanker	149,500	Replaced truck	Sold
Washington*	-----	-----	-----	-----

*Second rotation turn to come. \$ 1,033,800

The funds in the second rotation surpasses the first rotation amount by \$ 31,000+ with three companies still to purchase equipment.

The chart shows 16 pieces of apparatus were purchased. In nine instances the new piece did not replace an older piece of equipment as the old piece remains in service. Five other pieces of old apparatus were replaced with four of them being sold and the fifth is for sale. The Mount Rogers pumper, which went to the main Mount Rogers Grayson County station while the older equipment from the Grayson station was move to a satellite station at Konnarock in Washington County. Some concern was expressed to the study team about this arrangement. The feeling expressed is that the pumper purchased with Washington County funds ought be stationed in Washington County with the understanding that it will go into Grayson County when needed rather than being in Grayson County and coming to Washington County when needed. All things considered there may be merit to this point. However, this alone should not be the deciding factor. The real issue is, "under what arrangement do the citizens of Washington County get the best service"? This is the question that must be answered. It could very well be that locating the unit in Grayson County makes it more available to Washington County citizens than if it was at Konnarock. If getting the unit out of the Konnarock station is limited because of response problems whereas it would make more runs to Washington County out of Mt. Rogers then its location at Mt. Rogers may be acceptable. The point is that the issue should be examined and decided in a studied deliberate manner so that if it ever becomes a public issue the answers are available. Also some consideration should be given to how Washington County citizens feel about its location particularly those in the area protected by the unit.

According to information on hand Mt. Rogers made the following responses to Washington County over the years shown.

1993	5
1994	11
1995	17
1996	4

That is a total of 37 calls in four years.

The apparatus purchase program is excellent program and one other counties, particularly fire departments in other counties, might well be envious of. County officials and county firefighters should be proud of it and to that end it should be carefully monitored by the Washington County Firefighters Association to make sure it is managed in an exemplary manner.

It is evident from this program that individual fire organizations in the county and the Firefighter's Association have attained considerable credibility with the Board of Supervisors. It is important that this be maintained and enhanced. One way to do this is for the Association to take a firm leadership in role in assuring that good stewardship of the allocated funds is maintained. It should be uppermost in everyone's mind that the money received in this program is Washington County taxpayer's money; it is not donated money that one gives willingly. As such it is subject to a high level of scrutiny. Auditors of public accounts, local or state, can and, in all probability, will at some time require an accounting of these funds. It would best serve the county's fire service for the Association to take a leadership role in seeing that the best possible accountability mechanisms are in place in each department to assure that when any audit questions arise they can be accurately and expeditiously answered.

To provide guidance to the Association in taking a leadership role and assure good stewardship of the county's taxpayers money the following recommendations are made. Although the recommendations, as written, are directed to the Association they are also recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. If the Association does not assume the leadership/stewardship role it should than the Board of Supervisors should take the steps necessary to assure appropriate management control.

RECOMMENDATION 98-11

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/ County Fire Association assure that all specifications for fire apparatus to be purchased with county funds conform with the requirements of NFPA 1901 - Standard for Automotive Apparatus and that the specifications do not include items which are not necessary for efficient and effective fire fighting. In the event any company wants items over and above those needed to meet the NFPA standard or are not necessary for efficient and effective fire fighting purposes then that company should be required to pay for such items out of its own funds or the items should be removed from the specifications.

RECOMMENDATION 98-12

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association require a full and complete accounting of all county funds used to purchase fire apparatus be submitted to the Board of Supervisors upon completion of purchase and if the amount of funds authorized by the Board of Supervisors is greater than the amount spent the difference be returned to the County.

RECOMMENDATION 98-13

It is recommended that commencing with the next rotation of funds from the County that the funds can be used only for the purchase of: pumpers, tankers or pumper/tankers, and brush trucks.

RECOMMENDATION 98-14

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association establish the numbers and types of apparatus that each company should have to assure effective and efficient fire protection and that these will be the only pieces of apparatus subject to county support.

RECOMMENDATION 98-15

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association review the practice of companies purchasing new apparatus and retaining the supposedly replaced piece in their fleet.

RECOMMENDATION 98-16

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association consider developing a practice whereby replaced pieces of apparatus, in better condition than other pieces of apparatus elsewhere in the county, be used to replace the poorer condition apparatus. This is of particular importance as apparatus purchased with county funds begins to age.

RECOMMENDATION 98-17

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association adopt a policy providing for the transfer, between companies, of low mileage apparatus to replace high mileage apparatus.

RECOMMENDATION 98-18

It is recommended that in the future when apparatus purchased with county funds are replaced with new apparatus and sold that the funds received as a result of the sale be returned to the county.

Related to the matter of Association leadership and stewardship of county funds is whether companies have more apparatus than is needed to meet fire protection needs. This is partially addressed in one of the above recommendations dealing with companies keeping pieces of apparatus as part of their fleet when in actuality the pieces was supposed to be replaced.

Two situations need the attention of the Association in this respect. One has to do with the arrangement with the Konnarock situation. The other has to do with Clinch Mountain-Brumley Gap.

(For further on this see Addendum to this report.)

Another thing that comes out in looking at the rotation chart is that the time span represented in the charts. One rotation is nine years. At the end of a second rotation for any given company a new piece of apparatus bought during the first rotation will be 18 years old. This is not particularly old for a piece of fire apparatus, particularly in the Washington County environment where apparatus is really not run an excessive amount. The question becomes one of whether new pieces of apparatus should be bought just because the rotation money is available or should the funds be used for other purposes. Apparatus is not the only need the fire service has. A good use of rotation money if fire apparatus is not really needed would be the planned installation of a system of dry hydrants throughout the county. Other uses of rotation money need to be looked at with all the other questions arising out of proper management and stewardship of county funds. Perhaps a change of focus is in order. That is, why not consider rotation funds as funds to improve fire protections services in the county rather than only as funds to purchase new apparatus.

RECOMMENDATION 98-19

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/Fire Association consider whether to continue the nine year rotation schedule for purchasing fire apparatus or whether some other time frame be considered. It is further recommended that consideration be given to developing some criteria, other than age, to be used for deciding when apparatus should be replaced. As part of this, consideration ought to be given to other needs for which county funds might be better used for improving fire protections services.

RECOMMENDATION # 14

It is recommended that the county examine the need for purchasing a piece of aerial equipment.

This recommendation is moot in view of previous comments and, also, in view of the fact that Abingdon purchased an aerial ladder since the previous report.

The issue arising from this has to do with when the ladder truck is dispatched. There is no evidence that there is pre-planned automatic dispatch of the truck outside of the Abingdon's usual response area. This is consistent with the dispatch standard operating procedures used in the county which is that in most cases only one company is dispatched and additional companies are dispatched when the first due company determines other assistance is needed.

RECOMMENDATION # 15

It is recommended that the fire companies in the county, through the fireman's association, adopt NFPA 1901 - Standard for Automotive Apparatus - insofar as that standard establishes the minimum amount of hose which should be carried on fire apparatus.

This has become the standard for developing specifications for county fire apparatus. For the most part the standards for the minimum amount of hose to be carried on pumpers is being met. There are five pumpers in the county which do not meet the minimum standard for attack line (400 feet of 1.5 or 1.75 inch hose)) and five pumpers which do not meet the minimum standard for supply line (1500 feet of 2.5 or 3.0+ inch hose).

RECOMMENDATION # 16

It is recommended that the County Administration take steps to make sure that the deficiencies in self contained breathing apparatus and spare air bottles be corrected immediately and that fire apparatus in the county meet the requirements of NFPA 1901 insofar as breathing apparatus is concerned.

There is considerable improvement from 1987 to 1996 in the number of SCBAs and spare bottles in the county. In 1987 there were 68 SCBAs and 69 spare bottles. In 1996 there are 105 SCBAs and 124 spare bottles. In addition Glade Spring and Damascus, with their rotation funds, each purchased crash/rescue trucks equipped with cascade systems and Damascus has an approved Breathing Air Compressor in its station. These capabilities are available throughout the county on a "call as needed" basis.

There are still nine pumpers in the county which do not have the minimum number of SCBAs and eight which do not have the minimum number of spare bottles. Where these conditions exist it might be that corrections can be made by re-locating these items from one unit to another. Another possibility is that some of the apparatus may actually be older pieces which have been replaced by newer apparatus but still kept in service. In any event the following recommendation is made.

RECOMMENDATION 98-20

It is recommended that each pumper and tanker in service in the County which is or may be used in a fire suppression operation be equipped IMMEDIATELY with Self Contained Breathing Apparatus as specified in NFPA 1901 - Standard for Automotive Apparatus. Note the emphasis on "immediately" in the recommendation. This goes to the safety of personnel and meeting safety standards should take precedence over all other considerations.

RECOMMENDATION # 17

It is recommended that the county fire companies working with the Fireman's Association develop a standard response system for the county fire service.

Recommendation # 17, # 18, and # 19 are related and will be considered as one item in this report.

RECOMMENDATION # 18

It is recommended that the county fire companies through the Fireman's Association develop a standard response system for response to emergency incidents throughout the county.

RECOMMENDATION # 19

It is recommended that the County Fireman's Association and fire company leaders working with the County Sheriff's Office develop one set of procedures for the handling of fire service communications and that a standard operating procedures manual be prepared document these procedures.

The discussion of these three recommendations can be considered a sub-part of the matter of coordination which was first mentioned in Recommendation # 3. Coordination as it was addressed in 1987 was addressed in the general idea or concept of coordination and was meant to get the companies to work together on common problems. At that time it was apparent that the individual companies strongly guarded their self-autonomy and were reluctant to really come together to deal with problems, some of which were individual company problems while others were problems spread across all companies. Today, there are indications that, while not entirely overcome, considerable improvement has been made in the direction of "working together" for the common good. It should be evident to any still having some reluctance about "coordination", which is just another word for "working together", that working together does pay off.

Having made these strides it is time for the Association to move to another level of coordination which has application to emergency operations. This is to move away from the idea that fire protection is provided to Washington County citizens by nine fire departments and move toward the idea that protection is provided by one organization composed of nine fire departments.

The present understanding of "mutual aid" should be changed from having to call a second company if needed to one of "automatic mutual aid" in which a second company is automatically dispatched and turned back if not needed. There are separate agreements between some companies in Washington County that do this. What is being suggested is that this approach be applied by all departments across the county.

There are good reasons for this and there are certain things in place now that make it quite workable and easy to apply.

One of the problems with the present procedure is that if a second company is needed, either for additional apparatus or personnel, time is lost between the time the need is identified and the needed assistance is alerted and responds.

This approach will also help with the problem of low member response to calls as automatically

dispatching a second company assures that additional personnel will be en route in a timely manner.

There are also times when special pieces of equipment may be needed at an incident. In those cases that equipment should be dispatched with the original dispatch rather than waiting until the need becomes evident. The special equipment most frequently needed for a working fire is an air supply or a ladder truck. Once again the practice should be to have them dispatched as early as possible which is what is done in "automatic response".

The capability of doing this is present in the county's emergency communication center. What needs to be done is to establish committees or working groups which would do a number of things. One of the first would be to establish criteria for when a second company is automatically dispatched. It certainly isn't necessary to do this for every call. Where this procedure is used the usual practice is to dispatch two departments to structure fire calls. This might even be qualified further in that two departments are dispatched when the call indicates there is actually a fire, i.e when the caller reports flame and/or smoke present. In the event the call is for odor of smoke or alarm activation it may be that only one company is dispatched while the second is merely alerted. Those are things that need to be worked out to best meet the needs of the locality.

A second task would be to enter into the computer aided dispatch for every address in the system which departments and/or special equipment would be dispatched. The study team determined that there is a field available in the screen which would accommodate this. Of course, this will be a long term project but it is one which will prove to be most beneficial.

A further benefit of this would be to the duty dispatcher. They would no longer have to make decisions as to what companies need to be dispatched. It is on the screen in front of them when the computer brings it up in response to a 911 call.

RECOMMENDATION 98-21

It is recommended that the Association develop a dispatch procedure establishing an automatic multi-company response dispatch for specified types of incidents.

RECOMMENDATION 98-22

It is recommended that the Association establish a process which will result in entering in the 911 computer aided dispatch system specifying the companies and any special pieces of equipment to be dispatched to every address in the system.

RECOMMENDATION # 20

It is recommended that the county fire companies participate in the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System.

There is progress in meeting this recommendation according to VFIRS data for 1995, which was the latest available at the time this review was started in 1996. Five companies submitted VFIRS data in 1995. Three companies participated in 1994 and 1993. However, indications are that in 1993 one of the participants for that year came on line in mid-year. If any additional have come on line during the course of the review it was not reported to the study team. If any have come on line it is a simple process of changing the previous statement.

VFIRS information can be an important tool in examining what is going on in the operation of fire companies in the county. It can be used to look at each company and it can be used to look at fire protection activities across the county in the aggregate, if all companies participate. If they do not then the other alternative is to use the data that is available from those participating and make the assumption that what comes from that data probably applies across the board.

With this as a working premise and using only the year 1995 the following is an example of the type of information which can be drawn from the data.

Reports submitted:

Abingdon	412
Clinch Mt.	3
Glade Springs	208
Goodson-Kinderhook	35
Meadowview	<u>209</u>
Total	867

Those reports break down in the following categories:

	Fires	Rescue	Service	Good Intent	False Alarms
Abingdon	81	2	206	26	46
Clinch Mt.	2	0	0	0	0
Glade Springs	15	168	5	12	4
Goodson-Kinderhook	1	26	1	1	0
Meadowview	<u>40</u>	<u>106</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>8</u>
	139	302	244	51	58

Fire calls breakdown into the following:

	Structure	Brush/Grass/Woods	Vehicle
Abingdon	24	21	4
Clinch Mt.	1	0	0
Glade Springs	8	4	1

Goodson-Kinderhook	3	0	0
Meadowview	15	18	2

This is the routine type of information that can be pulled from the data. There are even further breakdowns of the data. It can be broken down into the number of dwellings, churches, schools, and on and on.

Other useful information relates to response matters:

Abingdon has an 8 minute average response time, Clinch Mt. 17; Glade Spring 7; Goodson-Kinderhook 9; Meadowview, 8.

The average number of members responding can be calculated: Abingdon, 19; Clinch Mt., 10; Glade Springs, 7; Goodson-Kinderhook, 6; Meadowview, 12.

The ways to use this information is limited only by the imagination of the user to develop the questions that need to be answered. It can be particularly useful in making reports to the County Administrator and the Board of Supervisors about individual department activity and activity across the county.

For example while the departments are called "fire" departments note that they aren't doing a lot of fire fighting. One hundred and thirty-nine fire calls out of 867 is not a lot of fires considering that most were not even fires. They are, however, providing a lot of service - 646 rescue and service calls.

It would also be possible to see if "fire" calls are increasing or decreasing in comparison to the growth of the county and from year to year. The same is true of the service/rescue calls.

Each year since 1989 more than 200 building permits were issued for single family dwellings and from 1991 more than 200 per year were issued for mobile home type dwellings. In 1995 this category broke the three hundred mark with 315 permits issued. So the county is growing. It is also increasing in commercial and industrial growth with 92 commercial permits and 31 industrial. Therefore, the need for continuing good "fire" protection is evident. Growth also has an effect on the number of service/rescue calls.

There is a lack of good data and information related to fire fighting activities in Washington County. The Virginia Fire Information Reporting System is an excellent system for gathering data needed to assess the present and to plan for the future. It is available at relatively little cost. It is in computer format. Training in using it is available. It take a little time each month to file the information, however, over time this commitment will be found to be well worth the effort.

RECOMMENDATION 98-23

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association require every company in the county to participate in the VFIRS system.

RECOMMENDATION # 21

It is recommended that the fire service in Washington County do whatever is necessary to develop the cohesiveness among the fire companies in the county and with the other emergency services in the county.

In some ways Washington County made progress in building cohesiveness in non-operational aspects but it still has some work it can do in operational cohesiveness.

The good way to move towards cohesiveness in operations is to develop an integrated incident command system as recommended under Recommendation # 3 and to develop automatic multi-company response procedures as recommended under Recommendation # 19 which has a direct relationship with Recommendations # 17 and 18.

SUMMARY

The format of this report is based on examining what has occurred in Washington County since a study of the fire services of the county was completed in 1987.

It is fair to say that the 1987 report has been used for the purpose for which it was prepared which was as a guide for action. The recommendations in the report were general with the specifics for carrying them out left to those to whom it should be - those at the local level.

Members of the Washington County Fire Association, the fire companies, and the Board of Supervisors have worked together to improve the fire fighting equipment in the county. There is an excellent approach to purchasing automotive apparatus. Improvements were made in such things as hose, personal protective equipment, and breathing apparatus. There are some instances in which minimum standards still are not met but these can be corrected with a little effort. Some of it can be accomplished by rearranging and reallocation of items among pieces of apparatus.

Significant strides were found in the working together by companies and the Association in the handling of administrative and management matters, such as the allocation of funds for purchasing apparatus, developing a standard radio operating procedures manual, and in having the Association being the "one" voice to the Board of Supervisors.

The same level of coordination has not been achieved in "operational" aspects. There are two things which should be given serious consideration. One is the development of a county wide incident command system. The other is the development of an automatic mutual response procedure. There are recommendations to this effect in the report.

One way to improve coordination from an operation sense is to take advantage of the capability of the 911/CAD system to have response assignments set for every telephone address in the county. It would also be of considerable assistance to dispatchers relieving them of the responsibility of having to make such determinations on their own. There are recommendations on this point in the report.

The final and probably the most important suggestion to come from this assessment is for the Association to take whatever action it feels necessary to fulfill its oversight of the responsibility placed on it by the Board of Supervisors to manage the automotive apparatus purchase and replacement program. Two rotations will be completed shortly. Before the third rotation begins the Association should give serious consideration to the allocation of funds in future rotations.

Some of the questions which might be addressed follow. Should the present system of distributing funds continue or should some other method be instituted? Should the same level of

funding be continued in the future? Should some of the funds be used for other equipment needs rather than automotive apparatus only, for example, getting all apparatus up to minimum standards or upgrading the radio system? Should apparatus be re-assigned from one company to another, depending on age and condition, rather than purchasing brand new pieces for every company every rotation? Should future funds be restricted to the purchase of fire fighting apparatus only, that is, pumpers, tankers, brush trucks? How will Mt. Rogers be dealt with in the future and what about the present issue of the location of the piece of apparatus purchased with Washington County funds?

Certainly the present allocation system - each company getting its share as its turn comes up - is the easiest and least controversial way of making allocations. However, these funds are public funds and not donations. Based on this the Association and its member companies need to be aware they are subject to public scrutiny and audit. With this in mind shouldn't the level of accountability for these funds by the Association and its members be the same as that expected for all other county funds?

It would be much better for the Association to deal with these issues rather than the Board of Supervisors concluding that it should do it or possibly being forced into it by some audit consideration. Over the years the Association has gained credibility in the eyes of the Board of Supervisors. Taking the step suggested above could only add to that credibility. There is a series of recommendations in the report dealing with these issues.

ADDENDUM

During the course of the review of the report two issues were raised which were not within the scope of the original purpose of the present study. One was location of fire stations, specifically Clinch Mountain and Brumley Gap. The other, having to do with water supply considerations, came after the first draft of the report was submitted to the Association for review and comment. Both are appropriate matters for the Board of Supervisors and the Fire Association to consider and each will be discussed in this addendum.

The first, location of fire stations cannot be considered or resolved as a single issue item but should be examined from the larger perspective of station location, area coverage, numbers, types, and assignment of apparatus throughout the county. Some of these topics are subjects of recommendations in the main body of the report. However, those recommendations were made from the perspective of managing the fire protection system in the county as it now exists and not from that of some fairly drastic changes.

Relocating or consolidating fire stations is an issue not easily resolved. The first problem is that the two stations triggering the issue are firmly established in their respective communities. A second problem is that a simple visual examination of the county fire station location map using a five mile radius around stations shows gaps in coverage that need attention. Thus the proper approach is not from the perspective of whether there should be a consolidation of stations and drive to that conclusion. The proper approach is to have the Board of Supervisors/ Fire Association determine what they want to accomplish, then go through a process of identifying ways to reach those goals, the Clinch Mountain-Brumley Gap being just one to consider. The Mt. Rogers/Konnarock situation is a second. A third is suggested by the visual map examination just mentioned above.

Using the five mile radius standard two sections of the county are immediately identified as not being within five miles of a fire station. These are best delineated by using map section identification numbers 29, 30, 40, 41, 42, 55, and 56 as one and sections 2, 3, 9, and 10 as the second. Both of these lie north of Rich Valley Road and would be affected by any consideration of Clinch Mt. and Brumley Gap. However, this also brings into the equation the location Goodson-Kinderhook station on Mendota Rd.

Most helpful in dealing with fire station location questions is a good data base. Unfortunately, there is no such database because there are departments which do not participate in VFIRS (there is a substantial discussion of this problem in the main body of the report). To examine this issue there will have to be a rather extensive reconstruction of fire data for a number of years in the past.

The water supply issue is another that needs more than cursory attention. Since this came up after a draft of the report was prepared there is little that can be done at this time. No water supply system data was gathered nor was any consideration given to the matter. It is probably a matter that needs attention given the county growth. But with no real data in hand it is difficult to say so with any degree of certainty.

It is, therefore, impossible to make any credible statement about what should be done in regards to the question.

Water systems for fire fighting purposes in Washington County are municipal type systems or rural water supply systems. Without some more information about which or both need to be looked at and what needs to be looked at there is little that can be done at this time. If the question has to do with expanding the county's municipal water systems to meet fire needs that is something that needs a special level of expertise. Bear in mind that the municipal water system has to be viewed in its entirety and not merely from a fire fighting standpoint. Thus there would be a whole new level of considerations.

If the question is looking at present water systems from flow and pressure considerations that is not too hard to do and someone can be found to do it. It probably can be done within the membership of the association, if not, there are other resources that should not be too difficult to tap. If the matter of water supply is looked at from a rural system perspective that can also be handled without too much difficulty.

It is appropriate to mention that rural water supply considerations can and should become one of the questions looked at as part of location and equipping fire stations.

All in all if the Association wants to address the items as set out in this addendum it is talking about a full scale study. To do that right takes some preliminary work mainly to identify just what the scope of such an undertaking ought to be.

The following are some questions that would have to be explored. It is not an all encompassing list but is offered more in the context of what is needed to get started.

What level of fire protection is the Board of Supervisors/Fire Association trying to attain?

Meet NFPA standards on water supply (1231)?

Meet some ISO rating?

How can these objectives be met?

What apparatus/equipment is needed?

Does the county have enough?

Does it need more?

Does it need different types than it now has?

How can an adequate water be assured?

Municipal water supply?
Dry hydrants?
Tankers?

Fire station location?
Relocate some?
Consolidate some?
Establish new ones?
Close some?

Where and in what time frame will growth occur?
What types of commercial/industrial growth?
Where will it locate?
What residential increases will occur?

The question really reduces itself to what does the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association want? Does it want to stick to a few narrow issues? Or, does it want to address the multiple broader issues outlined in this addendum. In any even the recommendation which follows is the only one that can be made at this time.

RECOMMENDATION 98-24

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors/County Fire Association clearly define the issues they want addressed and develop a process by which these issues can be dealt with.

The issues of fire station location, coverage, and apparatus needs, with commitment from within the Association and guidance from available sources can be done in-house. In all probability a study done in this manner will be more readily accepted and implemented. Evidence that this is possible is found in how Washington County used the 1988 study.

Depending on what is desired as far as water supply issues are concerned that might need help from a consultant specializing in that area.

VIRGINIA FIRE SERVICES BOARD



A Report of Findings
and
Recommendations:

**County of Washington
Fire & EMS Study**



October 2011

Table of Contents

REPORT AUTHORS	2
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
THEME 1: COMMUNICATIONS (PAGE 11)	3
THEME 2: ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PAGE 14)	4
THEME 3: FIRE AND RESCUE OPERATIONS (PAGE 21)	4
THEME 4: TRAINING AND SAFETY (PAGE 24)	4
METHODOLOGY	5
PHASE I: INITIATE PROJECT	5
PHASE II: OBTAIN STAKEHOLDER INPUT	5
PHASE III: PREPARE ANALYSES AND DEVELOP CORE STRATEGIES.....	6
PHASE IV: PREPARE FINAL REPORT	7
COUNTY DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	8
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	9
THEME 1: COMMUNICATIONS	11
THEME 2: ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	14
THEME 3: FIRE AND RESCUE OPERATIONS	21
THEME 4: TRAINING AND SAFETY.....	24
REFERENCES	27
SUPPLEMENTAL REFERENCES.....	29
APPENDIXES	30
APPENDIX 1: WASHINGTON COUNTY LETTER OF REQUEST	31
APPENDIX 2: WASHINGTON COUNTY TRAINING SUMMARY FOR FY2006 TO FY2011	32
APPENDIX 3: WASHINGTON COUNTY – VIRGINIA FIRE INCIDENT REPORTING SYSTEM REPORT SUMMARY	34
APPENDIX 4: WASHINGTON COUNTY – 2010 NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY STATISTICS.....	35

The foregoing is a recommendation authorized pursuant to Va. Code 9.1-203.A.4 and is not to be construed as legal advice or as a binding recommendation.

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Washington County Fire Rescue #1, Inc.	Damascus Volunteer Rescue Squad
Goodson-Kinderhook Volunteer Fire Department	Valley Rescue Squad
Meadowview Volunteer Fire Department	Washington County Life Saving Crew, Inc.
Glade Spring Volunteer Fire Department	Glade Spring Life Saving Crew
Green Spring Volunteer Fire Department	Clinch Mountain Volunteer Fire Department
Abingdon Fire Department	Damascus Fire Department
Brumley Gap Fire Department	
Washington County E-911 Communications Center	
Washington County Department of Emergency Management	
Washington County Administration & Board of Supervisors	

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Executive Summary

This report documents the findings and recommendations for the Washington County Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Study. The information contained is not to be construed as legal advice or as binding recommendations. This report is intended to provide guidance for Washington County's Administration and fire and rescue¹ stakeholders to build on what is working, while observing opportunities for improvement. It is believed that strategic focus on these areas will enhance the overall quality and coordination of fire and rescue service delivery to the communities served.

The study committee, comprised of Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB), Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP), and Virginia Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS) representatives, was requested by the Washington County Board of Supervisors and Administration to review several areas of responsibility within the County's fire and rescue services. The requested areas outlined were Levels of Service, Staffing, Governance, Accountability, Training, Safety, Operations, Administration, and Communications.²

This report documents the study committee's findings and recommendations that are organized into four working themes, to include:

- Theme 1: Communications
- Theme 2: Organizational Development
- Theme 3: Fire and Rescue Operations
- Theme 4: Training and Safety

Working themes provide a central focus for prioritizing study recommendations. They serve as a guide for the study committee to identify and evaluate measures that ultimately will improve the quality and coordination of fire and rescue services within Washington County.

Below is a high-level summary of the findings and recommendations, to be discussed further in the report.

Theme 1: Communications (page 11)

- **Infrastructure** – The County should update their communication system infrastructure to ensure adequate and consistent communications capabilities throughout the County.
- **Oversight** – The County should hire an Emergency Communications Coordinator to oversee the Emergency Communications Center (ECC), who is independent from law enforcement and fire and rescue functions. Additionally, the County should establish an Emergency Communications Advisory Committee to work with the ECC Coordinator to update the protocols, response zones and the overall ECC system.

¹ The terms Rescue and EMS are used interchangeably within this report

² Washington County Letter of Request; April 4, 2011, Appendix A

Theme 2: Organizational Development (page 14)

- **Governance** – The County needs to establish and codify ordinances, which outline the administrative and operational responsibilities and authorities within the County. In addition, the County should consider restructuring the Emergency Services Committee into a Fire Rescue Oversight Committee and developing a strategic plan for the County’s fire and rescue services.
- **Accountability** – The County should consider hiring a career Chief of Fire and Rescue and establish a clear Chain of Command within the County’s fire and rescue services. In addition, the Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should establish countywide Standard Operating and Administrative Guidelines.
- **Administration** – The County should evaluate departmental needs on a yearly basis, establish an accountability plan and explore a centralized purchasing and equipment standardization.

Theme 3: Fire and Rescue Operations (page 21)

- **Staffing and Personnel** – The County should consider hiring a career Chief of Fire and Rescue and a Volunteer Coordinator to assist departments with the recruitment and retention of volunteers.
- **Level of Service** – The County and the fire and rescue organizations should develop a standard for the expected level of service throughout the County, as well as, identifying the unique needs and challenges faced by departments.
- **Fire Prevention Activities**– Washington County should adopt the Statewide Fire Prevention Code and could employ a Fire Marshal to enforce the fire code, investigate fires and coordinate public fire and life safety education.

Theme 4: Training and Safety (page 24)

- **Coordinated Training Program** – The Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should establish a Training Subcommittee and work to coordinate training throughout the County. In addition, the Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should develop position-specific minimum training standards and increase the number of instructors within the County.
- **Safety Liabilities** – The County and the fire and rescue organizations need to address several issues related to compliance with Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 1910.134 (g). In addition, the importance of incident reporting into the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System should be emphasized and reporting should be increased.
- **Continuity of Leadership and Succession Planning** – The County should develop a program to grow the leadership within the fire and rescue organizations, as well as, a plan for the development of its future leaders.

The foregoing is a recommendation authorized pursuant to Va. Code 9.1-203.A.4 and is not to be construed as legal advice or as a binding recommendation.

Methodology

For each task of the work plan, we identified objectives, specific activities to be performed, and project products to be delivered. The following are the major study phases to provide information about the study process.

PHASE I: INITIATE PROJECT

Objectives: Initiation of Study:

To initiate the study, the study committee began by gaining a comprehensive understanding of the project's background, goals, and expectations. This was carried out by identifying in detail the specific objectives for the review, and assessing how well this work plan would accomplish the objectives. In addition, the study committee set out to establish a mutually agreed-upon project work plan, time line, deliverables, and monitoring procedures that would support the accomplishment of all project objectives. The final study initiation step consisted of collecting and reviewing existing operational data, information agreements, relevant policies and procedures, and any prior studies, audits, or reports. Many of these review materials are included in the appendix of this study.

As part of Phase I, the study committee met with County and department management to establish working relationships, make logistical arrangements, and determine communication lines. In each of these meetings, the study committee discussed the objectives of the project and identified policy issues and concerns central to the study.

The meetings also allowed the Committee to obtain pertinent reports and background materials relevant to the review, such as organizational charts and current and historical staffing data as well as a description of the current service delivery system and organization.

Based on this course of action, the Committee concluded this section of the study with a revised project work plan/timeline deliverable.

PHASE II: OBTAIN STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Objectives: Conduct Leadership Interviews & Capture Input from the Departments:

The second phase of the study consisted of leadership interviews and department evaluations. The expectations developed for this section of the study work plan were as follows:

1. Identify expected service levels;
2. Identify opinions of department officials, concerning the operations and performance of the department;
3. Town hall meeting with locality;
4. Identify issues and concerns of officials regarding Fire and EMS/Rescue services;
5. Identify perceived gaps in existing service levels and new priorities in mission;
6. Identify strengths and weaknesses as perceived by departmental personnel.

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Each of these goals were realized with the support of the Washington County's study project manager, Deputy Director Theresa Kingsley, Washington County Department of Emergency Management. Support from this individual assisted the study committee in finalizing the interview list and establishing an interview schedule that was reasonable, but more importantly, convenient for the interviewees. Hence, all interviews were conducted within the allotted time with a favorable amount of data being collected.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with each volunteer Chief and/or Agency Director, the County Administrator, Assistant County Administrator, the Washington County Dispatch Center personnel, the Washington County Department of Emergency Management, and held a Town Hall meeting. The study committee received descriptions of staffing and deployment responses in meeting service demands. The discussions also provided a snapshot of personnel management contentions as well as concerns regarding fire and rescue service delivery. It is also important to note that the study committee toured all of the fire and rescue stations in Washington County in an effort to supplement their research of the County's organizational functioning.

Combined data from the face-to-face interviews, site visits and supporting background materials relevant to the review provided the Committee a clear understanding of the organizational structures and fire and rescue service delivery in Washington County. Additionally, operational limitations and opportunities for improvement within Washington County were developed from the modes of research mentioned above, providing a framework for the report component of the study.

The deliverable for this section of the study work plan consisted of thoroughly analyzed interview responses/data, and the development of working themes to capture the study committee's evaluation.

PHASE III: PREPARE ANALYSES AND DEVELOP CORE STRATEGIES

Objectives: Evaluate Current Trends and Prepare a Report and Plan:

The third phase of the study work plan involved further investigation and understanding of the organizational structures, operations, limitations, achievements, and opportunities for improvement within the volunteer and career system. The activities that supported this process consisted of additional requests for information not already obtained in phase I and II of the work plan. Data requests, made in this phase of the study, attempt to address any issues that emerged from the interviews, and further evaluate implications of the operational issues cited. Data obtained during the study process also assists the study committee in identifying issues influencing the current levels of service.

After receiving and critically evaluating information from the interviews and all supporting materials, the study committee began preparing a plan that identified the critical action steps

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to achieve sound organizational functioning and uniform service levels throughout Washington County.

Each action step was selected to identify the changes in policies, facilities, apparatus, and equipment to ensure that the department would be capable of providing fire rescue services at the desired level going forward.

The deliverables achieved in Phase III involved a draft report component that evaluated current trends in the services being provided, recommended action steps to improve service, and the assignment of responsibility.

PHASE IV: PREPARE FINAL REPORT

Objectives: Prepare and Present Final Report:

The final phase of the study involved documenting the results of all previous tasks into a written report with critical components, such as an executive summary, methodology, background, and findings and recommendations. Once completed, a draft report will be shared with the designated locality project manager to ensure the content is accurate. Upon receiving corrections, the study committee will revise the draft report, as needed to assist in the preparation and issuance of the final report.

The deliverables for the final phase of the work plan consist of 1) a draft report, and 2) the final report.

County Demographic Information

Washington County is a largely rural county located in the Blue Ridge Highlands region of southwestern Virginia, bordered by Tennessee to the south. Within Washington County, there are several incorporated Towns, including Glade Spring, Abingdon, and Damascus, and partially the City of Bristol.

Washington County has a diverse economy, with manufacturing accounting for nearly 18 percent of the jobs in the County.³ After that, Government (Federal, State, and Local); Retail Trade; Healthcare and Social Assistance; and Accommodations and Food Services make up the remainder of the Top Five Industries by Employment.⁴ Fifty-nine percent of businesses have less than five employees and only eleven businesses have more than 250 employees.⁵

Washington County's 562.8 square miles⁶ contain approximately 97.5 persons per square mile and is predominately rural, with pockets of suburban living along the major transportation corridors, and near the Town of Abingdon and City of Bristol. The County has several diverse communities and a 2010 base population of 54,876 (7.4 percent increase from 2000).⁷

Thirteen organizations⁸ with a combination of volunteers and paid personnel provide the fire rescue services to Washington County. The current fire and rescue organizations are:

Washington County Fire Rescue #1, Inc.	Damascus Volunteer Rescue Squad
Goodson-Kinderhook Volunteer Fire Department	Valley Rescue Squad
Meadowview Volunteer Fire Department	Washington County Life Saving Crew, Inc.
Glade Spring Volunteer Fire Department	Glade Spring Life Saving Crew
Green Spring Volunteer Fire Department	Clinch Mountain Volunteer Fire Department
Abingdon Fire Department	Damascus Fire Department
Brumley Gap Fire Department	
Washington County E-911 Communications Center	
Washington County Department of Emergency Management	
Washington County Administration & Board of Supervisors	

³ VEC Community Profile: Washington County

⁴ VEC Community Profile: Washington County

⁵ VEC Community Profile: Washington County

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, Washington County Quick Facts

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Washington County Quick Facts

⁸ There is one ambulance services that assist with EMS transporting in the Washington County and was not a part of the Study interview process

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Findings and Recommendations

This section provides a summary of the four working themes for this study report. The summary is based on areas of concern that were repeatedly cited in the face-to-face interviews and observed during the site visit. Following this section is an in-depth examination of each theme, to include findings and recommendations.

Theme 1: Communications

- Infrastructure
- Oversight

Theme 2: Organizational Development

- Governance
- Accountability
- Administration

Theme 3: Fire and Rescue Operations

- Staffing and Personnel
- Levels of Services
- Fire Prevention Activities

Theme 4: Training and Safety

- Coordinated Training Program
- Safety Liabilities
- Continuity of Leadership and Succession Planning

Washington County's fire and rescue service providers and administration should utilize the national consensus standards, which were developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) with the input and support of fire and emergency services personnel, businesses, industry and other stakeholders, as guidance documents and resources to address several of the findings identified in this report.⁹

1. The 2010 edition of *NFPA 1710: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments* addresses the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations to the public by all career fire departments.¹⁰

⁹ For a complete listing of the national consensus standards developed by the National Fire Prevention Association, visit: http://www.nfpa.org/aboutthecodes/list_of_codes_and_standards.asp

¹⁰ The study team acknowledges that Washington County does not have a Career Fire Department; however, the County does pay for fire and rescue personnel that function within the volunteer departments.

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2. The 2010 edition of *NFPA 1720: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments* addresses the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations to the public by all volunteer fire departments.

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Theme 1: Communications

Before any fire and/or rescue personnel can respond to a call, the citizen communicates with the E-911 Communications Center and then E-911 Communications Center communicates to the fire and/or rescue service provider. When a Firefighter or Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) needs additional information or calls for help, they are utilizing their radio to communicate with the Incident Commander or the E-911 Communications Center. Therefore, it is imperative that Washington County's communication system work without interruption in times of citizen and provider need. Below are findings and recommendation for the theme of Communications, which include Infrastructure and Oversight.

Infrastructure

In Washington County, the equipment and infrastructure is dated and inadequate to provided communications coverage for the entirety of Washington County. The County has one Repeater Tower and the Towns of Abingdon and Glade Spring have segregated Repeater Towers. There is a singular dispatch channel and a singular tactical or incident scene channel to support on-scene operational communications. It was noted that the County has received a grant to purchase another Tower. Additionally, interviewees noted that there are dead spots throughout the County and that the pager notification system malfunctions, which has caused the County to begin texting information to providers. Below are several recommendations to assist in addressing these concerns.

Recommendations:

1. Washington County should update their communication system infrastructure to include towers, portable radios and pagers to ensure that the system meets the upcoming Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) narrowbanding requirement¹¹ and provides consistent communication capabilities throughout the County.
 - a. Washington County should consider a specialized study to identify the causes, impediments and solutions to issues of the communication system.
2. Washington County should ensure that in conjunction with their communication system infrastructure upgrade that the number of tactical or incident scene channels are increased to minimize the utilization of the dispatch channel for on-scene operational communications.

Oversight

In Washington County, the infrastructure and personnel that makeup the E-911 Communication System are separately administered by the Director of Emergency Management and the Sheriff, respectively. Not only are the Sheriffs Deputies and fire and rescue providers dispatched through the E-911 Communications Center, the Police Departments for the Towns in

¹¹ On or before January 1, 2013

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Washington County, Public Works/Utilities, etc are dispatched through the E-911 Communications Center. Washington County should be commended for its progressive County and Town combined E-911 Communications Center. However, a concern emerged, perceived or actual, that fire and rescue dispatching was given secondary importance to that of law enforcement dispatching. Additionally, it was noted that the E-911 Communications Center, later referred to as the Emergency Communications Center, is servicing administrative lines of the Sheriffs Office in addition to emergency phone lines, and is generally understaffed or inadequately staffed.

Recommendations:

1. Washington County should establish an establish an Emergency Communications Advisory Committee (ECAC) that is made up of law enforcement, fire and rescue and other stakeholders that are dispatched through the Emergency Communications Center.
2. Washington County should hire an Emergency Communications Center (ECC) Coordinator to oversee and manage the ECC. The ECC Coordinator should be independent from law enforcement and the fire and rescue functions.
 - a. The ECC Coordinator should work with the Emergency Communications Advisory Committee to ensure that the emergency communications infrastructure is updated to meet the needs of all stakeholders.
 - b. The ECC Coordinator should work with the Emergency Communications Advisory Committee to review and update dispatch protocols and response zones.
 - i. Washington County should utilize box-builder capability and advanced vehicle locator capability (GPS real-time tracking) to ensure that the closest company/units are dispatched for first due, second due, etc.
 - ii. Automatic Mutual Aid should be established for all departments, based on the closest company/unit, and high-level incidents should be assessed for automatic multi- or co-responses, such as structure fires and mass casualty incidents. This should include a process for activating an aero-medical agency for med-evac transports.
 - iii. Washington County should alter response zones based on proximity to Northbound and Southbound entrances and exits for Interstate 81.
 - c. The ECC Coordinator should work to ensure that the ECC system is updated to ensure that:
 - i. Cross-street signage is updated in the field and designated within the dispatching system;

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- ii. Hydrant locations, to include Dry Hydrants, are available within the dispatching system and relayed to responders in route; and,¹²
 - iii. Mapping and addresses are updated and integrated in the dispatching system.¹³
- 3. Washington County and the ECC stakeholders should ensure proper funding and staffing of the ECC.
 - a. Dispatch functions should be separated to primarily law enforcement and primarily fire and rescue; however, dispatchers should be cross-trained and rotate to ensure redundancy of capabilities.

¹² See Supplemental References

¹³ It was noted that some 911 addresses are based of the road that the residence faces, rather than the side street of the driveway. Additionally, it was noted that for business complexes, the address alone does not adequately describe where to respond to and should include the business name.

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Theme 2: Organizational Development

In order to improve Washington County's fire and rescue service it is recommended that the below internal organizational development strategies be considered. These recommendations will serve to stimulate the organizational cohesion, innovation, and effectiveness of Washington County's fire and rescue organizations, while guiding the inevitable change that will occur as you strengthen your fire suppression and rescue capacity.

Governance

Unified Coordination:

One of the boundaries faced by the Washington County fire and rescue service is the unified coordination of its fire and rescue services. Washington County is served by thirteen independent organizations, which includes seven (7) fire departments, four (4) emergency medical services agencies, and two (2) combination fire-rescue agencies. There is a Fireman's Association, an Emergency Volunteers Association (EMS), and an Emergency Services Committee. However, there are no ordinances or resolutions that provide guidance as to the administrative and operational responsibilities and authorities of these organizations. Based on observations, the Associations and the Emergency Services Committee are perceived as unproductive and generally disregarded in terms of decision-making. The lack of a clearly defined and understood governance system could have a negative impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of Washington's fire and rescue organizations.

Recommendations:

1. It is imperative that Washington County's Board of Supervisors establish and codify ordinances, which outline the administrative and operational responsibilities and authorities in regards to fire and rescue services and the organizations involved.
2. Washington County's Board of Supervisors should examine the feasibility of hiring a career Chief of Fire and Rescue as the central position responsible for the supervision and authority for all fire and rescue issues throughout the County.
 - a. This provides a unified command structure to effectively utilize and coordinate resources on a needs-based allocation structure, which will improve the efficiency of services provided to the citizens of Washington County.
3. The Emergency Services Committee should be restructured and converted into a Fire Rescue Oversight Committee to assist in the development of policies and procedures for Washington County's fire and rescue services and provide advice and feedback directly to the career Chief of Fire and Rescue.
4. This study should be used as a starting point for continuously reexamining and developing the most efficient and effective fire and rescue service to meet the community needs.

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Strategic Planning:

Washington County's fire and rescue organizations identified a need for increased coordination between the organizations. Operationally, this presents several concerns and barriers towards accomplishing a homogeneous, high quality level of service sought by Washington County and its citizens. This organizational challenge is partially attributed to the lack of unified vision, mission statement and strategic plan for the County's fire and rescue services.

Strategic planning must become institutionalized as an integral part of fire rescue system and community resource allocations. A strategic plan will provide the Fire Rescue System and Washington County a basis for long-term operational planning and will serve as a framework for services.¹⁴

Recommendations:

1. Washington County's fire and rescue organizations should develop a strategic plan for fire and rescue operations, in order to move from a fragmented group to a cohesive fire and rescue service or system.
 - a. Stakeholders, fire and rescue personnel, members of the Fire Rescue Oversight Committee, and members of the County's Board of Supervisors should each play an integral part in the development of this strategic plan in order to meet stakeholders expectations and foster commitment.
 - b. Washington County's fire and rescue organizations should analyze the gap between where they are and where they want to be, and identify strategies to close that gap. A neutral party could be considered to facilitate this process.
2. In developing its strategic plan, Washington County's fire and rescue service should strengthen its incident analysis and reporting, to include the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS) and the Virginia Pre-Hospital Information Bridge (VPHIB).¹⁵
 - a. Without reliable data, Washington County cannot appropriately develop a plan to address its needs.
 - b. By analyzing incident data, information on the frequency of call types, the causes of fires, the amount of loss from fires can easily be identified to help develop appropriate fire prevention efforts.
3. In developing its strategic plan, Washington County's fire and rescue organizations and stakeholders should develop a unified vision and mission statement for the fire and rescue service in Washington County.

¹⁴ Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments, November 2005

¹⁵ Several departments noted time constraints and a need for help with reporting. Additionally, it was noted that some rescue organizations lacked the necessary equipment to electronically report.

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- a. A unified vision statement will provide the fire and rescue organizations and Washington County a broad, aspirational image of the future of the fire and rescue service.
 - b. A unified mission statement will ensure that Washington County's fire and rescue organizations are collectively moving forward to improve service delivery.
- 4. As part of developing its strategic plan, Washington County's fire and rescue organizations should establish a system of measurable goals.
 - a. The strategic plan should identify immediate, intermediate and long-range goals with target deadlines. Goals should be quantifiable, consistent, realistic and achievable.¹⁶

Accountability

Chain of Command:

The fire and rescue organizations in Washington County work well together during incident operations. However, additional growth opportunities exist for the cohesion and efficiency of the fire and rescue service. Washington County's fire and rescue organizations are highly fragmented and there is no established organizational chart or chain of command. Washington County's fire and rescue organizations expressed opposition to a career Chief of Fire and Rescue, unless they served in an advising and assisting role to the current department Chiefs.

Recommendations:

1. Washington County's Board of Supervisors should examine the feasibility of hiring a career Chief of Fire and Rescue as the central position responsible for the supervision and authority for all fire and rescue issues throughout the County.
 - a. Transformation of the Emergency Services Committee into the Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should increase organizational cohesion through an integrated organizational structure, while maintaining volunteer involvement through advice and feedback on administrative decisions.
 - b. Within the new unified chain of command, volunteer chiefs could report as Districts Chiefs, Battalion Chiefs, or Deputy Chiefs to the career Chief of Fire and Rescue. Thus preserving autonomy and promoting a more cohesive fire and rescue service in Washington County.
2. Washington County and its fire and rescue organizations should continuously evaluate and ensure adequate and appropriate fire and rescue service coverage for the citizens and the safety of fire and rescue personnel.

¹⁶ Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments, November 2005

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Standard Operating and Administrative Guidelines:

Washington County does not have Standard Operating Guidelines or Standard Operating Procedures for its fire and rescue service. This creates confusion among members of the fire and rescue organizations as many function differently from each other, which reduces efficiency, effectiveness and accountability.

Recommendations:

1. The Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should work to create a single set of countywide Standard Operating and Administrative Guidelines with an accountability system and publish a Table of Contents or central listing.
2. The Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should take advantage of pre-existing resources on the development of Standard Operating Guidelines for Fire and EMS organizations, such as the United States Fire Administration's guide on developing Standard Operating Procedures, <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa-197.pdf>.
3. Once created, informational and training sessions should be held with all Washington County fire and rescue service members and partners. The Table of Contents or central listing and training should be included in new personnel packets and orientations to ensure integration into the Washington County fire and rescue service.

Administration

Washington County provides funding to the fire and rescue organizations for three basic purposes: operations, personnel, and equipment. The fire and rescue organizations supplement the County funding through various types of fund raising, e.g. Bingo, haunted forests or other events. Additionally, transporting rescue organizations utilize revenue recovery billing to supplement County funding and fundraising. The current economic conditions are challenging; citizens and elected officials expect fiscal responsibility, cost savings and quality services.

County Funding and Accountability Practices:

Washington County provides funding to the fire and rescue organizations without a consistent funding formula and utilizes incremental adjustments. The County currently requires an audit of the fire and rescue organizations. This is a standard practice across the Commonwealth of Virginia, but is disliked by some fire and rescue organizations within Washington County. Additionally, some fire and rescue organizations have been more successful than others at receiving other funding opportunities, such as grants.

Recommendations:

1. Washington County should complete a yearly countywide needs assessment for the delivery of fire and rescue services and develop a base funding allocation system upon the priorities set through the needs assessment and quantitative data.

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2. An accountability plan should be developed for the use of County funds and revenue recovery funds that is communicated to citizens and members of the fire and rescue organizations.
 - a. The accountability plan should be developed with fire and rescue organization participation. By creating an accountability plan and communicating funding usage, confusion should be reduced among citizens and the fire and rescue organizations on the usage of County funds.
3. Washington County could consider a Fire Tax or Fire District Tax to assist in funding fire rescue services within specific districts.
4. Washington County and its fire and rescue organizations should research and consider the availability of all federal, state and private grant programs, to include:
 - i. The Department of Forestry's Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grants: <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/fire/index-vfa.shtml>
 - ii. The Department of Forestry's Dry Hydrant Grant Program: <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/fire/dry-hydrants.shtml#GrantProgram>
 - iii. The Department of Forestry's Firewise Virginia Community Hazard Mitigation grants : <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/fire/index-mitigation.shtml>
 - iv. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG) programs: <http://www.firegrantsupport.com/content/html/afg/>
 - v. The Virginia Department of Health-Office of Emergency Medical Services' Rescue Squad Assistance Fund (RSAF) Grants: <http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Grants/index.htm>
 - vi. The grant programs offered by the Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB) through the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP).¹⁷
 - vii. Various private grant programs.¹⁸
5. Washington County should consider the feasibility of hiring a Grants Coordinator to assist the fire and rescue organizations with general reporting as well as the acquisition and management of grants.

Standardization and Centralized Purchasing:

Washington County's fire and rescue organizations have an impressive fleet of apparatus that is widely diverse among the fire and rescue organizations. An area of cost savings could be through standardization of equipment and apparatus between the fire and rescue organizations. This process is not without hurdles, but necessary to deliver cost effective and

¹⁷ A listing of available VFSB is available online, http://www.vafire.com/grants_local_aid/index.htm

¹⁸ A wide variety of Fire and EMS grants can be found on <http://www.grants.gov/> <http://www.firegrantshelp.com/nvfc/> and <http://www.emsgrantshelp.com/>

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efficient fire and rescue services. There is currently a fire apparatus and ambulance replacement program in Washington County, which has allowed the fire and rescue organizations to rotate in new apparatus; however, modifications to the program should be considered in order to sustain the program.

Recommendation:

1. The Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should survey each department to determine if equipment commonalities exist. The equipment commonalities list should be used along with strategic planning for Washington County's fire and rescue services routine maintenance and replacement of equipment, ambulance and fire apparatus.
 - a. The Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should identify a critical priority list of apparatus, using NFPA 1911 – Standard for Inspection, Maintenance, Testing and Retirement of In-Service Automotive Fire Apparatus¹⁹
2. The Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should develop specifications for future apparatus purchases (considering the differences between rural and urban needs), refurbishment and replacement using the following national consensus standards:
 - a. NFPA 1901 - Standard for Automotive Fire Apparatus²⁰
 - b. NFPA 1911 – Standard for Inspection, Maintenance, Testing and Retirement of In-Service Automotive Fire Apparatus²¹
 - c. NFPA 1912 – Standard for Fire Apparatus Refurbishing²²
 - d. Proposed NFPA 1917 – Standard for Automotive Ambulances²³
3. The Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should develop specifications for equipment replacement and central purchase activity areas and contracts. Below are suggested areas/activities for central purchasing:
 - a. Fuel – ensures all departments are paying the same price and reaping the same cost savings.
 - b. Insurance – develop one countywide policy that covers all departments, to include Workers Compensation.
 - c. Personal Protective Equipment²⁴ and Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus²⁵ – ensures that all departments are purchasing compatible equipment that meets

¹⁹ National Fire Prevention Association, NFPA 1911, 2007

²⁰ National Fire Prevention Association, NFPA 1901, 2009

²¹ National Fire Prevention Association, NFPA 1911, 2007

²² National Fire Prevention Association, NFPA 1912, 2011

²³ National Fire Prevention Association, NFPA 1917, Proposed 2013

²⁴ National Fire Prevention Association, NFPA 1971, 2007

²⁵ National Fire Prevention Association, NFPA 1981, 2007

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National Fire Protection Association standards and reaping the same cost savings.

- d. EMS Supplies and Equipment – The fire and rescue organizations should seek to centralize purchasing of EMS equipment, supplies, and medications. This should help to streamline patient transfers and equipment/supply exchanges among organizations and facilities.
- e. Equipment/Apparatus – The Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should survey each department to determine if equipment commonalities exist. As previously mentioned, common apparatus specifications should be created and contracted, allowing organizations to make customizations without significantly altering the specifications and reap the benefits of group purchasing for routine maintenance and replacement of ambulance and fire apparatus.

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Theme 3: Fire and Rescue Operations

The fire and rescue services in Washington County have slowly evolved as the county has developed and grown. Some of the fire and rescue organizations have personnel, whose salaries are County funded, while others are paying volunteers per call. Washington County's fire and rescue service faces continuous community development and growth. These recommendations will serve to stimulate Washington County's fire and rescue service's organizational cohesiveness, innovation, and effectiveness while guiding the inevitable change that will occur as fire suppression and rescue capacities are strengthened.

Staffing and Personnel

Several issues are affecting the fire and rescue personnel of Washington County's fire and rescue service. Included in this study are additional resources for recruitment and retention activities. Currently, there are two personnel loosely tasked with assisting Washington County's roughly 425 volunteer fire and rescue personnel. In addition to the volunteer personnel, Washington County pays for three (3) fire department personnel and six (6) EMS/rescue personnel who work for the respective fire and/or rescue organizations.

Recommendations:

1. Washington County's should examine the feasibility of hiring a career Chief of Fire and Rescue as the central position responsible for the supervision and authority for all fire and rescue issues throughout the County.
 - a. County funded personnel should be under the management of the career Chief of Fire and Rescue. Current part-time and full-time personnel paid by the fire and rescue organizations should be incorporated into the county funding and under the management of the career Chief and Fire and Rescue. Thus, allowing these personnel to receive benefits and insurance as county employees and developing the base for a countywide fire and rescue system. However, this is not without obstacles as the current personnel are also volunteer members of the departments and would prefer to remain a part of their respective fire and rescue organization.
 - b. Washington County should work with the fire and rescue organizations to identify needs for additional fire and rescue personnel to meet service demands and citizen expectations.
2. Washington County should examine the feasibility of hiring a Volunteer Coordinator to assist the fire and rescue organizations with recruitment and retention of volunteers, and to develop a Countywide Recruitment and Retention Program.

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- a. The Countywide Recruitment and Retention program should take into consideration the needs of current volunteers and identify motivational factors to keep this population engaged and committed to the fire and rescue service. The program should also include some level of incentives that are consistent across the fire and rescue organizations.
 - (i) The Volunteer Coordinator should consider benchmarking with similar volunteer and combination departments to develop ideas for incentives that support volunteer retention efforts.
 - b. Washington County's fire and rescue organizations have had recruitment and retention programs in the past, but data is absent regarding the effectiveness of these programs. The Volunteer Coordinator should work to develop an ongoing process to attract, mentor, and evaluate existing recruitment and retention programs.
 - c. The Volunteer Coordinator should develop a single Countywide Volunteer Orientation process leveraging the best practices of existing orientations in order to provide a consistent foundation for all new volunteers.
3. In addition, Washington County's fire and rescue organizations should take advantage of pre-existing recruitment and retention information. Resources may be downloaded at the following locations:
- (i) Emergency Medical Services (EMS)-
http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Recruitment_Retention/index.htm
 - (ii) BecomeEMS.org - <http://www.becomeems.org/>
 - (iii) Fire/Volunteer (Guide) - <http://www.nvfc.org/resources/rr/retention-recruitment-guide/>
 - (iv) Fire/Volunteer (Video) - <http://www.nvfc.org/files/documents/Retention-and-Recruitment-Volunteer-Fire-Emergency-Services.wmv>.
 - (v) 2004 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission Report. "Review of EMS in Virginia" Part III of the report; *Recruitment, Retention and Training of EMS Providers* (Page 55) –
<http://leg2.state.va.us/dls/h&sdocs.nsf/4d54200d7e28716385256ec1004f3130/87c75ac37063994d85256ec500553c41?OpenDocument>

Level of Service

All interviewees in Washington County expressed a desire for consistent and equal service across Washington County. Especially in the area of EMS; fire and rescue organizations and the County acknowledged a need for increased Advanced Life Support (ALS) coverage. Additionally, some fire and rescue organizations felt under equipped to meet unique challenges specific to their response areas.

Recommendation:

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1. Washington County and its fire and rescue organizations should develop a standard for the expected level of fire and rescue service to the citizens of the County. Additionally, the County and the fire and rescue organizations should identify areas of improvement. This process could be linked with the development of a Washington County Fire and Rescue Strategic Plan.
2. Washington County and its fire and rescue organizations need to identify the unique challenges faced by each department and work to minimize or eliminate them.
 - a. For instance, it was noted that driveways in the South Holston Lake area are generally not large enough for fire apparatus to access homes. Thus a fire boat or some other solution should be explored.

Fire Prevention Activities

Currently, there are few, if any, fire prevention activities in Washington County and there is no coordination of those activities. Washington County has not adopted the Statewide Fire Prevention Code, which are “statewide standards to safeguard life and property from the hazards of fire or explosion arising from the improper maintenance of life safety and fire prevention and protection materials, devices, systems and structures and the unsafe storage handling, and use of substances, materials and devices, including fireworks, explosives and blasting agents, wherever located.”²⁶

Recommendations:

1. Washington County should adopt the Statewide Fire Prevention Code. The Statewide Fire Prevention Code allows for cost recovery. Utilization of a fee structure would enable Washington County to generate revenue to help support these activities.
2. Washington County should employ a Fire Marshal for the enforcement of fire codes, to conduct fire investigations, and to coordinate public fire and life safety education.

²⁶ 2006 Statewide Fire Prevention Code, Preface, page i.

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Theme 4: Training and Safety

Training and continuity of leadership are closely joined in that solid basic training will foster strong, continued cooperation within Washington County's fire and rescue service. Additionally, skills development is the basis for safety and improved service to the citizens. Below are findings and recommendations for the following areas: Coordinated Training Program; Safety Liabilities; and Continuity of Leadership and Succession Planning.

Coordinated Training Program

The fire and rescue organizations in Washington County work hard to ensure offerings of mandated and relevant training. Additionally, Washington County has a program for funding fire service training in the Community College system through the Washington County Fireman's Association. However, coordination is necessary to achieve a greater number of training offerings and associated cost savings opportunities. Currently, there is no training coordination in the County among the fire and rescue organizations. Better coordination and increased local offerings could also assist recruitment and retention efforts of Washington County's fire and rescue organizations.

Recommendations:

1. Washington County should establish a Training Subcommittee under the Fire Rescue Oversight Committee to compile individual fire and rescue organization requests and coordinate training within Washington County.
 - a. To increase efficiency, Washington County could be geographically organized into training groups to assist in the determination of needed training within their area and assist in the coordination of training within their training group. This strategy would reduce the time commitment and travel associated with training.
2. Washington County and its fire and rescue organizations should work to increase the number of available instructors to better serve the fire and rescue organizations.
 - a. The goal of increasing the number of instructors should be focusing on increasing the flexibility and accessibility of training for fire and rescue personnel, through the utilization of the training groups and clustered training.
3. The Fire Rescue Oversight Committee should develop and support position-specific minimum training standards for Washington County's fire and rescue organizations (i.e. Driver/Operator, Officer in Charge, Attendant In Charge, etc).
 - a. National and State standards should be used as the guide for the development process as appropriate.

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Safety Liabilities

Due to the current organizational structure and the lack of policies and procedures, the below areas have been identified as potential liability issues for the County. Fire and rescue organizations acknowledged that when personnel are available, Rapid Intervention Teams are utilized, however, it is not a standard practice. Therefore, the Fire Rescue Oversight Committee in a sub-group or workgroup should address these issues.

Recommendations:

1. Washington County and the fire and rescue organizations should address the lack of a Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) policy and training compliant with Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 1910.134(g)(3) – Procedures for Immediate Danger to Life and Health (IDLH) Atmospheres.²⁷
 - a) The following standards should be utilized to develop the aforementioned policy and training program:
 - i) *NFPA 1720: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments*
 - ii) *NFPA 1407 – Standard for Fire Service Rapid Intervention Crew*
2. Washington County and the fire and rescue organizations should address the lack of facial hair policy and respiratory protection training compliant with Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 1910.134(g)(1) – Facepiece Seal Protection.²⁸
 - a) The following standards should be utilized to develop the aforementioned policy and training program:
 - i) *NFPA 1500: Standard for Fire Department Occupation Safety and Health Program*
 - ii) *NFPA 1404: Standard for Fire Service Respiratory Protection Training*
3. Washington County and the fire and rescue organizations should strengthen its system of incident reporting and analysis. It is important that the County timely and accurately report to the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS) and the Virginia Pre-Hospital Information Bridge (VPHIB). See Appendix for a list of County departments currently reporting to VFIRS.
4. Washington County and the fire and rescue organizations should develop a single countywide accountability system for incident accountability to ensure consistency, interoperability, and safety of all emergency responders.

²⁷ OSHA, 29 CFR 1910.134.g.3

http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=12716

²⁸ OSHA, 29 CFR 1910.134.g.1

http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=12716

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Continuity of Leadership and Succession Planning

Washington County and the fire and rescue organizations should focus on developing a continuity of leadership or succession planning program that focuses on training and mentoring future leaders from within to ensure retention of institutional knowledge.

Recommendation:

1. Washington County should develop a program that illustrates to all fire and rescue personnel the value of leadership and interpersonal relationship skills.
 - a. Washington County should consider the following elements for inclusion in the program:
 - i. A professional development program, which partially exists through the Community College program with the Fireman's Association; and,
 - ii. Incentives for advanced training and higher education.
2. Washington County should offer leadership training focused on growing new leadership within its fire and rescue service.
 - a. Leadership training should be offered as an ongoing long-term project.
 - b. With the assistance of a trained facilitator, the fire and rescue organizations should hold a focus group to determine how to accomplish and successfully implement the program.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Washington County Letter of Request – 4 April 2011.

Appendix 2: Washington County Training Summary for FY2006 to FY2011.

Appendix 3: Washington County - Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System Report Summary

Appendix 4: Washington County 2010 Needs Assessment Summary Statistics

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Appendix 1: Washington County Letter of Request



COUNTY OF WASHINGTON, VIRGINIA

DULCIE M. MUMPOWER
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
G-01 "WILSON" ELECTION DISTRICT

15093 CLOUDBVIEW ROAD
ABINGDON, VIRGINIA 24202
(276) 669-5993 TELEPHONE
dmumpower@washcova.com E-MAIL

April 4, 2011

Chief Richard E. Burch, Jr., Chairman
Virginia Fire Services Board
Virginia Department of Fire Programs
1005 Technology Park Drive
Glen Allen, VA 23059

Dear Chief Burch:

As Chair of the Washington County Board of Supervisors and member of the Emergency Services Committee, I am respectfully requesting that the Virginia Fire Services Board undertake a study of the fire and emergency medical services in the County. Because our Board of Supervisors does not meet until after the upcoming VFSB meeting on April 8, I am forwarding this request confident that the entire board will be in fervent agreement and will formally approve this request as put forth by the Emergency Services Committee at our next meeting on April 19. There have been several informal discussions about commissioning this study with each member offering full support.

Washington County wishes to maximize opportunities for improvement in the areas that will enhance the overall quality and coordination of fire and EMS service delivery for our citizens. Though areas for review will be specifically outlined as we move forward with the assessment, some of the areas in which we wish to focus are levels of service, staffing, governance, accountability, training, safety, operations, administration, and communications.

A letter advising of the Board's approval will be forthcoming following our meeting. However, in the mean time if I can provide additional information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me. I may be reached through the County Administration Office at (276) 525-1300.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dulcie M. Mumpower".

Dulcie M. Mumpower, Chair

Cc: Ms. Brook Pittinger, VDFP Director of Administration
Mr. Mark Reeter, County Administrator
Ms. Pokey Harris, Director of Emergency Management

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Appendix 2: Washington County Training Summary for FY2006 to FY2011

This information is a compilation of training data, for Fiscal Years 2006 through 2011, from the Fire Service Training Record System (FSTRS) maintained by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. For more information on FSTRS, http://www.vafire.com/fire_service_training_record_system/index.htm

Course	Students
Officer Development Seminar	9
Fire Service Training - Aircraft Live Fire Training	1
Fire Officer II - (NFPA 1021-03)	3
Fire Officer III - (NFPA 1021-03)	2
Fire Officer IV - (NFPA 1021-03)	2
Fire Inspector In-Service Training	1
Fire Inspector Legal In-Service	1
Fire Investigator "In-Service" Training	5
Fire Investigator - (NFPA 1033-03)	2
Public Fire & Life Safety Educator I (NFPA 1035)	2
Communicating With Children	5
Environmental Crimes Awareness	1
Adjunct Instructor In-Service Training	5
NFPA 1403 Compliance Officer	1
Fire Instructor I – NFPA 1041-07	7
Fire Instructor II Certification Course NFPA 1041-02	2
Fire Instructor I - Upgrade NFPA 1041-02	3
NFPA 1403 Awareness	14
ARFF - General Aviation 16 Hour (Structural)	17
H-465/ICS 300 -Intermediate ICS For Expanding Incidents	3
H-467/ICS 400 - Advanced ICS For CGS & MACS Ops 1st Responders	2
Command And General Staff Functions - Practical Evolutions	1
NIMS - ICS Planning And Forms	1
Intro. To Nat'l Fire Incident Reporting (V.5)	1
Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System - Ver. 5 Overview	2
Fire Attack - Essentials	24
Fire Attack - Evolutions	1
Hazardous Materials Awareness NFPA 472-02	27
Hazardous Materials Awareness & Operations NFPA 472-08	52
NFA - Juvenile Firesetter I	1
NFA - Courtroom Preparation For First Responders	5
N.F.A. Arson Detection For The First Responder (ADFR)	2
N.F.A. Leadership I: Strategies For Company Success	2
N.F.A. Leadership II: Strategy For Personal Success	4
N.F.A. - M. C. T. O.: Decision Making	1
N.F.A. - Preparation For Initial Company Operation (PICO)	1
N.F.A. - Strategy And Tactics For Initial Company Operations	2
N.F.A. Incident Safety Officer (ISO)	1

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N.F.A. Health And Safety Officer (HSO)	3
N.F.A. Emergency Response To Terrorism: Basic Concepts	1
Intro To Wildland/Urban Interface Firefighting	4
Mayday, Firefighter Down 16-Hour Program	6
Mayday, Firefighter Down - Awareness	27
L. P Gas Emergencies	3
Water Rescue - Initial Response NFPA 1006-00	15
Rope Rescue Awareness And Operations - Phase 1	9
Rope Rescue Operations - Phase 2	6
Structural Collapse Rescue For HTR Regional Teams	1
Trench Rescue Technician - NFPA 1006-03	14
Trench Rescue - Awareness & Operations	4
Vehicle Rescue Awareness And Operations	15
Farm Machinery Extrication	28
Vehicle Rescue Technician - NFPA 1006-03	6
Driver/Operator-Aerial Certification Course NFPA 1002-98	15
Driver Operator/Pumper Certification Course NFPA 1002-03	6
Rural Water Supply 16-Hour Training Program	11
Basic Pump Operations - 16-Hour Training Program	38
Firefighter I - NFPA 1001-08	43
Firefighter II - NFPA 1001-08	27
Emergency Vehicle Operation - Class 1	48
Emergency Vehicle Operation - Class 2	48
Emergency Vehicle Operation - Class 3	38
FIRE OFFICER III - Train-The-Trainer	1
FIRE OFFICER IV Train-The-Trainer	1
FIRE INSTRUCTOR 1 - Train-The-Trainer	2
Mayday Awareness Online Train-The-Trainer	6
NFA – PICO "Train-The-Trainer"	1
Driver Operator/Pumper Train-The-Trainer	2
Firefighter I And II - Instructor Trainer	1
Firefighter I And II Train-The-Trainer	11
EVOC - "Train-The-Trainer"	1
EVOC - Train-The-Trainer Update	1

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Appendix 3: Washington County -- Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System Report Summary

The Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VD FP) manages the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS). VFIRS is the statewide system for tracking all emergency responses with fire departments in Virginia. By reporting their incidents to VFIRS, fire departments document the details of their incidents for legal purposes and documenting the overall activities of their fire department. By reporting incidents, fire departments get credit for everything that they do in responding to incidents in their area. VFIRS also helps to show the value of a fire department's public service to their community.

Washington County Fire Departments		
Damascus Volunteer Fire Department†	Glade Spring Volunteer Fire Department	Meadowview Volunteer Fire Department
Green Spring Volunteer Fire Department	Clinch Mountain Volunteer Fire Department	Washington County Volunteer Fire Department
Goodson-Kinderhook Volunteer Fire Department	Brumley Gap Volunteer Fire Department	Abingdon Volunteer Fire Department

Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System Statistics 2006-2010

Item	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2006-2010
Number of Reporting FDs	8†	7††	5‡	6‡‡	7††	
Reporting Period	Jan - Dec	Jan - Dec	Jan - Dec	Jan - Dec	Jan - Dec	
Incident Type (Count)						
Fires	164	194	122	127	162	769
EMS/Rescue	720	548	264	275	601	2,408
Hazardous Condition	170	163	214	333	246	1,126
Service	70	65	89	181	134	539
Good Intent	132	104	124	106	106	572
False	163	130	117	134	145	689
Other	28	15	28	85	87	243
Total Incidents	1,447	1,219	958	1,241	1,481	6,346
Aid Given	57	43	42	38	45	225
Exposures	0	4	0	1	2	7
Total No. of Responses	1,504	1,266	1,000	1,280	1,528	6,578
Incident Type (%)						
Fire	11	16	13	10	11	12
EMS/Rescue	50	45	28	22	41	38
Non-Fire and Non-EMS	39	39	59	68	48	50
Dollar Loss						
Fire Dollar Loss	\$4,958,000	\$451,900	\$916,450	\$1,134,445	\$757,885	\$8,218,680
Casualties						
Civilian Fire Injuries	1	2	2	0	1	6
Civilian Fire Deaths	1	2	0	1	1	5
Fire Service Injuries	1	0	0	3	2	6
Fire Service Death	0	0	0	0	0	0

† Damascus Volunteer Fire Department did not report incident information into the VFIRS system.

†† - Damascus and Green Spring did not report incident information into the VFIRS system.

‡ - Damascus, Green Spring, Clinch Mountain and Goodson-Kinderhook did not report incident information into the VFIRS system

‡‡ - Damascus, Clinch Mountain and Goodson-Kinderhook did not report incident information into the VFIRS system.

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Appendix 4: Washington County – 2010 Needs Assessment Summary Statistics

The Fire Service Needs Assessment is an annual survey conducted by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. Fire departments complete a survey questionnaire designed to identify the needs of Virginia's Fire Service. Results are compiled and published in a comprehensive report available each year in January. Below are excerpts of the specific information provided by Washington County's reporting fire rescue organizations.

Fire Department Personnel	Current†	Additional Need‡
Career Firefighters	7	8
Volunteer Firefighters	128	35
Paid-per-call Firefighters	0	0
Total Firefighters	135	43
Civilian-Paid	0	1
Civilian-Volunteer	1	3
Total Civilian Personnel	1	4

***Please Note:** Damascus, Green Spring, Clinch Mountain, Goodson-Kinderhook, and Brumley Gap did not complete Needs Assessment Survey Responses, and thus are not a part of these statistics.*

†Taken from Supplemental Table 1 of the 2010 Virginia Fire Service Needs Assessment.

‡ Number from Supplemental Table 7, means needed on top of the current column.

Apparatus Owned	Current‡	Additional Need ‡‡
Aerial Apparatus	2	1
Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) Vehicle	0	0
Ambulance / Other Patient Transport †	2	0
Command Vehicle	4	2
Engine / Pumper	8	1
Quint Combination Vehicle	0	0
Rescue / Fire Boat	0	0
Tanker	4	1
Technical Rescue Vehicle	2	1
Wildland Brush Truck	4	1
Other Apparatus	4	0

†The Needs Assessment is completed by Fire Departments and Fire Rescue Departments.

‡ Taken from Supplemental Table 2

‡‡Taken from Supplemental Table 5

Equipment Owned	Current†	Additional Need‡
4-Gas Monitors	6	9
Map Coordinate System – GPS	6	24
Mobile Data Terminals	0	17
Personal Alert Safety Systems (PASS)	75	0
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	194	87
Radios	182	15
Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA)	75	8
Thermal Imaging Cameras	8	4
Other Equipment	0	0

†Taken from Supplemental Table 3

‡Taken from Supplemental Table 6

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