

# East Fork Fire Protection District Is A Busy Place Minden November 18, 2016

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It used to be only on very rare weather events or similar types of circumstance that the responders of East Fork Fire Protection District experienced call volumes like they did a few weeks ago, but it seems that is no longer the case.

On October 27th, 2016, East Fork responded to 38 calls for service over a 24 hour period and on a day that would seem as just any other ordinary day. The call types varied, but with almost any fire based emergency medical services delivery system, the majority of calls were medical emergencies. However there was also a steady mixture of multiple fire responses and vehicle accidents. Battalion Chief Troy Valenzuela had to rely on mutual aid from Mono County and Tahoe Douglas FPD to satisfy some responses. Most of time, East Fork relies on its neighbor to the north Carson City and visa a versa, but Carson City Fire Department is seeing similar challenges as well.

East Fork has seen a marked increase in call volume over the past 5-7 years and an average daily response growth from 10 calls per ten years ago to an average of 20 calls a day, despite a decline in population and limited growth in the district as a whole. Over the past two days, Battalion Chief Larry Goss had to handle the district responding to three working structure fires, with two of them being reported only a few hours apart. While this may be an isolated case, what is not isolated is the fact that the potential for multiple calls occurring at the same time is now routine and the Battalion Chiefs are having to make response adjustments on the fly at times.

“Even our responding Engine Captains are making decisions to divert to other priority calls as was the case yesterday” said District Chief Tod Carlini. The District’s Engine 12, responding from north county to a working structure fire in the Autumn Hills area had to divert to a cardiac emergency in Johnson Lane. District Chief Tod Carlini stated, that “20 to 22 calls a day is now becoming the norm and not the exception and that the complexity of the call types challenge our current and traditional staffing models as well as our geography.”



With the downturn in the economy beginning in 2008, East Fork has not been able to increase staffing since 2009, yet the call volume has increased by over 22% and volunteer numbers have decreased by 50%. In fact, since April of 2016 District Fire Chief Tod Carlini has had to postpone the hiring of three open Firefighter/Paramedic positions due to budget constraints.

Most recently, the district has opted not to replace a Deputy Fire Chief who accepted a position as the Fire Chief of Twin Falls, Idaho. The district has also not filled a fire inspector position for over a year, all in hope of redirecting funding to additional line staff. Recently, the board did vote unanimously to reinstate the firefighter/paramedic positions which will be filled beginning January 2016. While the down turn in the local economy and the impacts of the Affordable Health Care Act have severely impacted revenues for the district to the tune of about \$350,000 annually, the economic down turn and very slow recovery locally, also continues to impact the district’s once strong volunteer force.

One of our most important recruiting pools used to be the construction industry, noted Carlini. Currently there are approximately 50 volunteers and most are serving in critical logistical roles now as opposed to equally important attack firefighting. The district is considering some programmatic changes which it hopes will enhance volunteer opportunities in the future and those which are more focused on the logistical and wildland fire response capacities. Focused or "targeted" recruitment efforts are also being considered.

As the district anticipates and transitions into a new and independent governing board after the first of the year, the administration, staff, and volunteers are currently working on updating our current Standards of Cover." The assigned group is relying on response data and current local, state and national standards to make and propose some significant adjustments in response which take into account the "new normal" for the district. One glaring fact, which is supported by both data and standards is the need for additional staffing on fire related incidents be they career or volunteer personnel. In both cases, the district is challenged with the cost of additional career personnel and a lack of volunteer recruit base in many areas of the district. Combine that challenge with the time and training demands that are required for volunteer personnel and one can see why recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighting forces continues to be a struggle. The Standard of Cover is the guiding document which defines the deployment of resources, staffing, response time goals, and essentially the level of service that can be provide by the district. The new district board will be asked to consider changes to the original document which was adopted in 2013 and included in the Douglas County Master Plan.

East Fork Fire District serves 97% of Douglas County with a District population approaching 46,000 residents and seasonal swells to 55,000 residents and visitors. East Fork does this with a daily staffing of 19 firefighters, firefighter/paramedics, engineers, captains, a battalion and a duty chief daily supplemented with our volunteers when available. At almost any given time, two of the current four district ambulances, staffed with two personnel may be committed to medical calls, thus reducing the number of personnel for a fire response to 15. While that number may be a bare minimum necessary for a fire response, one need to remember that their response times may be in excess of 25 minutes if responding from the northern or southern ends of the district.

With the holidays approaching and colder weather already here, the East Fork Fire Protection District would I like to remind everyone who has a fire place or wood stove to make sure it is operating correctly and to have working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in your home.

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