

2A. Historical Perspective

Adopted
21 September 2000

Revised February 2009

Fire Services in Thurston County:

Fire services in Thurston County are provided by 16 separate fire departments, of which three are municipal (part of city government), and the rest are fire districts. Fire districts are separate taxing entities, governed by a board of three or five elected commissioners, with the purpose of providing fire protection for that geographically designated area. All of the fire departments in Thurston County provide fire protection and emergency medical services (EMS) on the basic life support (BLS) level. There is a separate county agency in Thurston County called Medic-One, who provides advanced life support (ALS) functions and operates in coordination with each of the fire departments. Each of six ALS units is housed in a strategically located fire station. Thurston County has a centralized dispatch center with enhanced 9-1-1 service and computer aided dispatch capability. All alarms are transmitted to the fire departments over radio paging equipment.

All of the fire departments in Thurston County, with the exception of the City of Olympia, have volunteer firefighters. Most of the departments are either fully volunteer or have a mix of career and volunteer staffing. There are approximately 120 career and 430 volunteer firefighters in Thurston County.

Fire District 8 History:

What now is known as Thurston County Fire Protection District 8 (also known by its more common name of South Bay Volunteer Fire Department), was formed by a group of neighbors in April of 1953. It started with a loaned pick-up truck (with a pressurized water tank in the back) parked in the firestation (a garage belonging to the South Bay Grange), and the neighbors responded to a grand total of 15 fire calls that year. Later, a new station was built on South Bay Road and a brand new pumper purchased for \$3,500 (the District still owns this truck, and is housed in its new station).

Fire response continued to be the mainstay for the department for many years until 1973 when the Thurston County Medic One system came into existence. Quickly, EMS calls began to outnumber fire calls in volume.

A substation was built in 1965 on the Johnson Point Road (Station 8-2) and another built in 1979 on the Puget Beach Road (Station 8-3). The first resident firefighter (living in a mobile home behind a firestation) was added in 1984, and the first full-time employee was hired in 1985. In 1998, the District moved into its new headquarters station across the street of the old main station. In 1998, the District responded to over 500 calls for the first time, and in 2006 exceeded 600 calls.

Fire District 8 Demographics:

Thurston County Fire Protection District 8 lies in the northern portion of the county covering an area of 23.1 square miles, generally on a point of land surrounded by inlets of the Puget Sound. The District currently has a

District Call Volumes

From 1953-1977 (per year):

Fires: 24.3 (57%)
Medical: 12.1 (28%)
All Other: 6.5 (15%)

Total: 43.0/year

From 1978-2008 (per year):

Fires: 65.1 (17%)
Medical: 364.8 (68%)
All Other: 59.5 (15%)

Total: 389.4/year

Past 10 years:

Fires: 67.0 (12%)
Medical: 395.6 (70%)
All Other: 101.1 (18%)

Total: 563.1/year

2008 Annual Call Volume:

Fires: 66 (11%)
Medical: 419 (72%)
Public Svc: 59 (10%)
False: 33 (6%)

Total: 577

Fire District 8 Demographics (Continued):

District 8 2009 Facts:

Assessed Value: \$1,157,724,351

Operating Budget: \$1,314,000

Population*: 8,010

Average Pop Growth*: 1.9%/yr.

Area: 23 square miles

ISO Rating: 8 (w/tender credit)

Volunteer Members: 40

Career Members: 8

Fire Commissioners: 3

Stations: 3

* Source: 2005 TRPC
Population Forecast

\$1,314,071 annual operating budget (labor costs for career & volunteer members, operating & maintenance costs, incident readiness & response costs). The current population of the District is listed at just over 8,010 with an average annual rate of growth (through 2025) of 1.9%. Demographic information on the District is summarized in *Appendix 1a*. The District features some high value waterfront properties, and only 18% of the homes in the District existed prior to 1960. Many small farms and other agricultural lands have been converted to low or mid density housing, with 53% of the total District housing being built since 1980. The median income for a household in the District is over \$63 thousand, with 2.67 residents. Over 44% of the households have moved into the District since 1995. The median age of a District resident is 41 years.

There is very little commercial and no industrial occupancy in the District. Of the significant occupancies, there are two salt-water marinas, a grange hall, an elementary school (sprinklered), and a dozen or so small commercial concerns. Fire prevention inspections are conducted by the Thurston County Fire Marshal. There are three areas in the District that have fire hydrants, each of a different water system, with less than 10% of the District's assessed valuation covered. Firefighting water must be delivered by tender trucks for most exposures. The District currently has an Insurance Services Office fire rating of "8", with tender credits for all residential properties.

Fire District 8 Governance & Staffing:

The District is administered by a Board of Fire Commissioners, elected for six-year terms on a staggered schedule (every two years). The Board appoints the Fire Chief (a full-time career position) who manages the day-to-day activities of the District. The Fire Chief appoints the staff of officers for the District, some of which are full-time career and some volunteer. Currently, there are four full-time career officers, one full-time career District Secretary, three full-time intern-firefighters and thirty-five volunteer firefighters. Volunteers are organized into nine duty shifts each commanded by a Captain; each shift is on-call on a nine-day rotation.

Ongoing training for all staff is coordinated by the District's training officer in coordination with the Thurston Fire & Rescue Training Consortium and Thurston County Medic-One. Training is provided Monday nights for two-to-three hours, on duty-shifts and during other special drill periods. Most of the District's staff has received Emergency Medical Technician or First Responder training. Firefighter training is based upon nationally recognized standards and curricula.

Current Fire District 8 Issues:

Increasing response load and complexity of the type of calls presents a significant challenge to the District. In the EMS field, delivery of cardiac defibrillation treatment by first responders is in place. Fires, even in single family residences, can present new dangers with more and more synthetic and exotic fuel loads. Hazardous materials, from agricultural chemicals and household materials to a growing presence of meth-amphetamine labs, is an ever-present potential problem. To meet these demands and those imposed by regulatory agencies and recommended standards, the general level of

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Current Fire District 8 Issues (Continued):

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training for firefighters has been increased significantly. Likewise, the ability of volunteer fire departments to retain qualified staff has correspondingly suffered due to the increasing demands for training and response participation as well competing distractions (e.g. family, job, and hobbies). It is because of these issues that the District has undertaken its first comprehensive strategic planning process.

Strategic Planning Process:

Early strategic planning efforts were accomplished in 1991, 1992 and 1995, primarily for capital planning (for facilities and equipment). These efforts, coupled with initial draft of District policies and procedures in 1990 and 1991 established the first documented business or strategic plan for the District. While relatively narrow in scope, both processes expanded during the decade of the nineties until the Board determined in 1999 that a comprehensive strategic plan should be developed. It was envisioned that this would be a “living document” that would relate directly (and be updated by) an annual business plan and budget.

In January of 1999, the Board commissioned Fire Service Management Systems to conduct a two-phase study: 1) to identify and evaluate administrative practices planning efforts, organizational structures, personnel relations, facilities & equipment and financial management practices, and 2) based upon the evaluation from phase 1, provide recommendations with a strategic approach to implementation as well as documentation of all findings. The contractor also provided facilitation for workshops during this process.

“The Strategic Plan is designed to be a “living document”, and be constantly updated as Annual Business Plans are developed and accomplished and Budgets implemented.”

After a series of workshops and meetings by the Board and the Management Team, a Mission Statement, Organizational Values, organizational roles & responsibilities and goals (for each of the identified business areas) were developed and adopted. It was also decided by the Board to create a full-time position for Fire Chief, and appointed the first career Fire Chief in June 1999.

The format and general content of the Plan were further developed in 2000, and the first elements of the Plan adopted by the Board in April 2001. In 2005 and 2006, the Executive Team spent considerable time in evaluating the existing Plan, current deployment practices (staffing, apparatus and station location), mission focus (volunteer emergency response), services provided and volunteer staffing. In 2007 an updated Vision, Mission, goals & objectives were adopted and are now being implemented through the District Business Plan for 2008-2009.