

Your Exeter Township Volunteer Fire Department

Being known as the community's "fire department" has both positive and challenging aspects. On the positive side, being associated with the long-standing traditions of selfless service pioneered by the original fire companies in Exeter Township as well as those of communities around the nation certainly is a source of pride for our members. We are honored to be charged with the responsibility of protecting our citizens from the dangers of uncontrolled fire, and it is a responsibility we do not take lightly.

However, being known as the *fire* department, while certainly a fitting title, can at times create some challenges, especially when we attempt to convey to the public exactly what it is we do. Often, we hear "there aren't really that many fires" as individuals try and understand why there is a need for the equipment, apparatus, and facilities that we maintain. While indeed the number of structural fires has decreased over the years, the void created by the lack of working fire responses has been more than adequately filled by other, just as important life-saving calls for service. It is these additional responses, which are part of the over 1000 calls answered during 2011, that drive the Exeter Township Volunteer Fire Department toward ensuring that we are always ready to serve no matter what the emergency.

The following briefly outlines the various services the Exeter Township Volunteer Fire Department provides. The goal here is to help those interested in, but not necessarily familiar with, our operations why we are more than just the *fire* department!

Structural Fire

The ETVFD is a full-service fire suppression organization, offering engine (pumper), ladder (truck), and rescue company operations. Our fleet of fire apparatus consists of one structural engine, two rescue/engines, an engine/tanker, and an aerial ladder tower. All front-line fire apparatus are equipped with water pumps and tanks, as well as supply and attack hose lines, which means any one

of these vehicles can initiate a fire attack upon arrival at a scene. More than 50% percent of our firefighters are certified at a minimum to the level of Firefighter 1, and the department participates in the PA Office of the State Fire Commissioner departmental certification program. The department drills regularly in basic and advanced structural firefighting techniques.

Brush / Wildland Fire / Urban Interface

For fires occurring that involve grass, brush, and forest materials, the ETVFD has a full complement of equipment. Our all-terrain brush firefighting units carry water, tools, and safety equipment necessary to fight these fires, which at times can be in remote locations and in rugged terrain. ETVFD personnel responding to brush fires have received wild land firefighting training through the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT)

Hazardous substances such as chemicals, solvents, radioactive material, petroleum products, and biological materials pass through our area every day. When an accident occurs at a HAZMAT location or with a vehicle or rail car carrying dangerous substances, the ETVFD is called to action. The ETVFD maintains a hazardous materials spill trailer which can be rapidly deployed to the scene of accident in order to contain a HAZMAT spill and prevent damage to life, property, and the environment.

In the event of a chemical, nuclear, or biological incident, we also maintain a specially equipped trailer which contains a mobile mass decontamination shelter. In cooperation with the Berks County EMA, the trailer can be used to decontaminate adults and children exposed to hazardous materials during an accidental or intentional HAZMAT release. This trailer and capability is an integral part of our Homeland Security and anti-terrorism efforts at the ETVFD.

All of our qualified firefighters are trained at the Hazardous Materials Operations level, and receive annual recurrent training and certification to respond to these highly dangerous situations.

Rescue

Rescue operations comprise a good portion of our workload. We regularly respond to vehicle rescues, where individuals are trapped within cars and trucks involved in accidents. Three of our front line apparatus carry hydraulic rescue tools, often known as the "jaws of life", and can perform vehicle rescue operations upon arrival at an accident.

Besides vehicle rescue, the department is also well equipped to handle a variety of other predicaments that individuals may find themselves in. These situations include high angle elevations, confined spaces, ice, water, and remote location/rugged terrain. Many of our members possess additional, specialized rescue training above and beyond their basic firefighter certification. Rescue is a highly technical and complex specialty operation, and our crews also drill regularly in rescue to maintain proficiency.

Emergency Medical Service

Requests for emergency medical assistance comprise approximately 25% of our annual response totals. The ETVFD is dispatched to assist on all critical medical emergencies where individuals are reported to be not breathing or be without a pulse. In addition, the fire department responds to critical medical emergencies when the local ambulance is busy on another call or when the ambulance crew requests additional medical assistance. Our personnel arrive on the scene and provide life-saving interventions until the ambulance arrives.

Five of our vehicles are fully equipped to comply with state Quick Response Service (QRS) standards and our service has received "Excellence" recognition from the Pennsylvania Department of Health. These vehicles carry all of the same equipment as a basic ambulance; however do not

transport patients to the hospital. All fire department vehicles are equipped with an Automated External Defibrillator (AED), which can shock a cardiac arrest victim's heart beat back into a normal rhythm, and all have basic medical gear on board.

All active firefighters are required to maintain basic first and CPR training. The majority of our firefighters are also certified as first responders, emergency medical technicians (EMT), or paramedics. This is known as the "dual role" concept, where one individual is trained to function as both a firefighter and an emergency medical provider. This concept has been embraced by many large and small communities across the United States as an efficient way to provide emergency services. No matter where they are, our vehicles and crews are ready to respond when a community member is ill or injured.

Fire Prevention and Education

The ETVFD has a very aggressive fire prevention program. This program is comprised of several efforts such as school student fire safety classes, distributing smoke alarms, providing fire house tours, and performing community education campaigns. Our members regularly participate in fire prevention activities and take pride in being able to educate the public on how to be safe. The ETVFD partners with many of our local industries, businesses, and schools to make these events happen. We often say that if one life is saved due to our fire prevention efforts, the efforts were worth it! We also tend to think that our active participation in fire prevention may at least partly explain the downward trend in structural fires and fire mortality over the years.

Pre-Incident Planning

The best time to plan for a fire or rescue response is before it actually happens! For that reason, the ETVFD spends a good deal of time performing pre-incident planning. This involves identifying target hazards in our community and

evaluating the resources and tactics that may be necessary to respond to an emergency at that location. All information is recorded and then distributed to all officers and members in the event an emergency occurs at the location. Our on-duty personnel perform these evaluations on site working with the owners and managers of the properties.

Everything else

In most communities, when a person or family doesn't know what to do, they call the fire department. Exeter Township and St. Lawrence Borough are no different. Our firefighters respond to all kinds of requests for help, from ducks caught in a storm drain, water in a flooded basement, and even cats in trees (not kidding). We do our best to accommodate most requests we receive when our other responsibilities do not take priority. We understand that to some, a seemingly minor incident might feel like a major disaster. Therefore we are happy to provide a sense of relief for those individuals.

Volunteers

When you stop to consider everything that the Exeter Township Volunteer Fire Department provides for the community, it is important to remember that the majority of this huge workload is accomplished by volunteers. While we do provide qualified volunteers with a modest stipend, it does little to compensate them for the sheer amount of work they perform, the time they spend away from their families, and the risks they take. These volunteers give freely of their time to provide these services because it gives them satisfaction knowing they are helping their community.

Our innovative volunteer staffing program has been recognized by fire service experts as a "best practice" on both the state and national levels. However, the system requires that our volunteers *continue to volunteer* and that as time progresses we are able to attract and retain new volunteers. Therefore it is important that the fire department

provides facilities and equipment to allow our volunteers to perform their work in an inviting and safe environment whenever possible. Without continued support for our volunteer-based system, it is quite possible that the essential responsibilities of the Exeter Township Volunteer Fire Department would go unmet, and a significant change in operations - such as the transition to a fully paid fire department - would be required. While there are certainly some benefits to relying on paid firefighters, the financial burden of duplicating our current service level with a fully paid staff would be many, many times more than the current municipal funding stream can support.

Therefore, an investment now in supporting volunteer firefighters, such as construction of a new centralized fire station, can help avoid a significantly more costly investment in fully paid personnel in the future. This is the future of our fire department.

Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about your Exeter Township Volunteer Fire Department, the services we provide, and our unending mission. If you have any further questions, please feel free to stop by the station, give us a call, or speak with a firefighter when you see them out in the community. We are always happy to talk about what we do, and of course to gently remind everyone that we do more than just put out fires!

For more information, please use the contact information below:

Station: (610) 779-8848

Website: www.exetertwpfire25.com



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