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# BOARD FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND RESERVE OFFICERS

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June 2004

## Retired Volunteers Cannot Remain Active

We are frequently asked if retired volunteers, those who are receiving a monthly pension or those who have received a lump-sum settlement, can continue to volunteer with the department. RCW 41.24.170 says that “Whenever a participant has been a member, and served honorably for a period of ten years or more as an active member...the board of trustees shall order and direct that he or she be retired and be paid a monthly pension...”. Since retire is defined as “leaving office or employment”, **retired volunteers cannot continue to be active volunteers.** If you have other volunteer positions that do not include emergency medical, firefighting duties, you may, of course, continue to use your retired firefighters in those capacities, but they cannot be insured by the state board and you must find insurance for them somewhere else. We suggest that you check with your supplemental insurance carrier or with the Department of Labor and Industries for coverage for volunteers who are not covered by the Board for Volunteer Firefighters and Reserve Officers.

## A Word from the Executive Secretary

*Brigette K. Smith*

We have just returned from our second administrative training class in Bellingham. We will be in Wenatchee in just a few weeks (please see a full listing of all class dates and locations on the last page). We are really hoping to see as many of you as possible in the upcoming months. We know that working through a claim or a remittance form or dealing with all the legalities can sometimes seem overwhelming. It is our hope that we can help train everyone to be comfortable working with our system. It is also nice being able to meet all of you and put faces to the voices that we talk with so frequently.

We will also be experiencing another big change in the office. Pam has decided to retire after almost 20 years with the Board. We know that we will miss her. She has brought a lot of valuable experience and knowledge to this office and we will certainly feel the loss. We now must begin the arduous process of finding another person willing to fill her position. We are hoping to find someone with experience as an administrative assistant/secretary who also has a strong background in the fire service. It would be a huge bonus if they already had experience working with the BVFF & RO. If you or anyone you know is interested, please have them contact us at (877)753-7318 as soon as possible. We will explain the job duties and the application process and hope to hire some time in August or September.

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### *EMS Rules:*

*When responding to a call, always remember that your ambulance was built by the lowest bidder.*

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# Completing Remittance Forms

We've now processed most of your 2004 annual remittances. However, some departments still have not submitted their fees for this year. **Please remember that the annual remittance is always due on January 1 and becomes delinquent on March 1.** We must charge you 1% per month statutory interest penalty for late submittals. We do not bill you for your fees, since they are statutory and we cannot know how much you owe. This is entirely dependant on the number of volunteer firefighters or reserve officers you report and the fees you pay for them.

The remittance form we receive from you is the legal evidence of the membership of your department and should be complete and accurate as of the first of the year. These forms will be scanned for future reference and archived as historical documents. **Therefore, we ask again that they follow the format provided and be printed on legal (8 1/2" X 14") paper.** The templates are available on our website in Excel and Word formats. If you use the preprinted form available from our office, please type or print legibly so that future generations will be able to read and decipher the forms.

Please list your firefighters & officers alphabetically with last name first. This is very important when we post the fees and search for names to verify membership. You are getting quite good at listing all members of a district as one entity rather than breaking them up by department or station. Thank you!!

This year we have begun to enter every reported firefighter & officer into the pension database, even when a pension payment is not made. This will increase the accuracy of our actuarial surveys and will also allow us to easily access and print service records for all of your members. In order to do this, **it is absolutely necessary that SSN's and birthdates be submitted for every member!**

**Please remember to submit supplemental remittances whenever new volunteer firefighters or reserve officers are accepted into your department.** When submitting supplemental remittance forms throughout the year, please continue to use the template or forms provided. If you fax the form to us as the members are accepted, we can be sure to use

their correct start dates when the fees are paid. If we do not receive some type of documentation, such as the faxed form, we will date their service as of the date we receive the remittance.

Finally, **please tell us when you wish us to use your credit balance to pay new fees.** Each receipt you receive from us has the current credit balance in the center of the form. Your available credit is that which appears on the last numbered receipt you received. We frequently receive forms with no checks and no instructions whether to use credit or not. It would help us and make the auditors very happy if you would note on the remittance how much, if any, credit you wish to use for the current fees. Many of you already do this and we are grateful.

## Where does Credit Come From and How Can I Get it Back??

There are several ways your department may accrue a credit balance with the state board. Some of these are:

- 1) Over payment on fees or interest due
- 2) Too many pension payments paid for a member: Only 25 pension payments may be made for any one pension member. If you make more than 25, we will credit the additional payments to your credit account as soon as we catch the error. We do not always catch the error when receipting or posting the payment, so sometimes the credit receipt is sent several days, months, or even years later. We will always catch it eventually, however.
- 3) Reporting a member in error: If you think a person is joining and pay his/her fees and then never hear from them again, notify us and we will be happy to refund the erroneous payment to credit. Also, if someone is reported who is not eligible, we will refund the fees when the ineligibility is determined.

To receive a refund of your credit balance, simply complete an invoice voucher asking for the refund, have it approved by your local board, and submit it to us for processing. Or you may use your credit as fees become due.

## YOUR LOCAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### WHO IS ON YOUR LOCAL BOARD? WHAT ARE ITS DUTIES?

The local board for a **city fire department** includes the mayor, city clerk, one council member, the fire chief, and one firefighter elected annually by the membership.

For a **county fire district**, the local board includes the chair of the commissioners, one other commissioner, the secretary of the commissioners, the fire chief, and one firefighter elected annually by the membership.

A **county reserve officer board** consists of two members of the county legislative authority and the county auditor, or their designees, the sheriff, and one reserve officer elected annually by the membership.

A **city or town reserve officer board** consists of the mayor, if one exists for the municipality, and one member of the municipality's legislative authority (or two members of the municipality's legislative authority if a mayor doesn't exist), or their designees, the clerk, comptroller, or chief fiscal officer of the municipality, the head of the law enforcement agency, and one reserve officer elected annually by the membership.

An **emergency medical service district** board consists of two of the members of the county legislative authority and the county auditor, or their designees, the head of the emergency medical service district, and one emergency worker from the EMS district elected annually by the membership.

The local board of trustees is required by law to have a set monthly meeting date and to meet when there is business to conduct. The purpose of the local board is to administer the Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Relief and Pension Act on the local level.

Its duties include enrolling eligible members in the disability portion of the plan and determining which members are eligible to participate in the pension plan. The local board is responsible for preparing the Remittance Forms and paying the necessary fees.

(Continued on back page)

## Motor Vehicle Accidents

In the event of an accident involving another vehicle in which the driver of the other vehicle is at fault, please report it as usual and know that we will still pay all medical expenses involved for your firefighter or reserve officer. However, we do request that in such a case you forward to us the insurance information of the at-fault driver. It is often possible for the state board to recover expenses from the insurance company of the at-fault driver. This will save money that can continue to pay benefits for our volunteers.

## Preparing Invoice Vouchers

Most of the time the vouchers we receive are done correctly; however there are a few things that can be done to save time and paper:

- 1) The name and address for Payee for Warrant is the party you would like us to write the check to. The top left-hand box of the voucher should contain their name and address.
- 2) You may leave the top right-hand box empty as long as the original billing statement with CPT codes is attached. You do not have to send the voucher to the physician's office.
- 3) We do need the signature of the injured member when paying disability compensation or reimbursing for prescriptions, mileage, or other expenses.
- 4) We need the signature of a representative of the department or municipality if refunding a credit balance or reimbursing for firefighter physicals.
- 5) Please fill in the date(s) of service, CPT code(s) and amount billed. Then have the local board review the claim and sign in the appropriate places.
- 6) More than one bill for the same payee can be combined onto one voucher unless the bills are for different patients. You do not have to prepare a separate voucher for each bill.
- 7) When listing service charges, you may combine more than one charge, regardless of the date of service as long as they use the same CPT code. This will save a lot of space on the voucher.

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The local board is responsible for the reporting of accidents within ninety days of their occurrence. If accidents are not reported within this time, claims cannot be paid by the state board! As you know, we supply postcards (please put them in an envelope to mail them) and an on-line postcard report form that can be sent directly to our e-mail to make the reporting requirement easier to comply with.

Also, since the staff of the State Board consists of only three people, the law has made it the responsibility of the local board to hear all claims and determine if the claims are valid. **All requests for payment from the BVFF must be approved at a local board meeting and noted in the minutes.** Please do not "blank check" sign the vouchers. If you question any medical bills or claims, call us before you approve them and we will help you decipher them.

The local board is required to keep a public record of all proceedings, receipts, and disbursements made by the board and to make an annual report of them.

The state board is planning a series of classes for local administrators to be held around the state. Check the list for one in your area! To register, contact us at 877-753-7318 or e-mail [pamb@bvff.wa.gov](mailto:pamb@bvff.wa.gov)

## 2004 State Board Seminar Schedule

**COME MEET US AND LEARN ALL ABOUT THE BOARD FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS, WHAT WE DO AND HOW TO COMPLY WITH ALL THE RULES AND REGULATIONS:**

**Central Washington:** July 14 at Chelan County FPD #1 in Wenatchee

**Olympic Peninsula:** July 29 at Jefferson County FPD #6 near Port Townsend

**Southwest Washington:** August 18 at Clark County FPD #6 near Vancouver

**Northeast Washington:** September 22 at Spokane County FPD #8 near Spokane

**Southeast Washington:** October 20 at Union Gap Fire Department near Yakima

**Southwest Washington:** November 17 at Grays Harbor County FPD #2 near Aberdeen

Board For Volunteer Firefighters and Reserve Officers  
PO Box 114  
Olympia, WA 98507