
BOARD FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND RESERVE OFFICERS

December 2002

A Word from the Executive Secretary

Brigette K. Smith

What a busy time! The office has seen many changes over the last year, and one of the hardest, yet most exciting, has been the appointment of a new board member. A new member, however, means the loss of a familiar face.

Dean Hills has served on the Board since 1987. That was almost 15 years of service! He served as the chairman of the Board for almost 8 years. During the time that he served, the Joint Survivor Option was added, the act's name changed from The Volunteer Firemens' Relief and Pension Act to The Volunteer Fire Fighters' and Reserve Officers' Relief and Pension Act, Emergency Service Districts and Reserve Law Enforcement Officers were allowed to participate, Disability compensation rose from \$55.00 a day to \$90.66 a day, a \$152,000 line of duty death benefit was added, the pop-up provision was added to the survivor option, the limitation on departments' membership was removed, cost of living allowances were built in for the disabled and line of duty death surviving spouses, and the maximum pension

increased from \$200.00 a month to \$280.00 a month.

Dean has worked hard to make improvements to the BVFF & RO. His contributions and leadership have been invaluable. We will miss Dean. The Board may have elected a new chair, but Dean is irreplaceable.

Annual Remittance Reminder

Remember, your annual remittance forms are due January 1st every year, and are delinquent March 1st. They are not due on March 1st. Statutory interest is charged beginning April 1st.

Your remittance forms should be a reflection of your membership on January 1st, not the day you complete the form. In other words, you should not report a volunteer who began February 10th on the January 1st remittance form that you complete on February 25th. A separate remittance form has to be filled out for all members who join your department after January 1st.

To be eligible for participation, volunteers must be active firefighters or EMT's, or active commissioned reserve officers. Auxiliary personnel, secretaries, commissioners, chaplains, gardeners, computer programmers, wives, etc., are not eligible for participation in either the disability or the pension provisions of RCW 41.24.

If you are not sure whether you are correctly reporting any members of your department, please call us. It is much better to correct erroneous reports now than to wait to correct the reports until a person believes they have vested a pension.

You might be a Firefighter if...

You always wear red suspenders and your first name is not Santa.

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Investigatively Speaking...

We sometimes hear from Local Boards that want to understand what their scope of authority is. One of the main duties of the Local Board is to determine eligibility for benefits (RCW 41.24.080).

Sometimes, it is really easy to tell that an injury was caused by a participant's fire or law enforcement duties, but other times the local board may suspect the injury either occurs somewhere else, or that the volunteer's injury or illness may not have happened because of their volunteer duties. We have also seen cases where Local Boards will question the treatment being received by one of its volunteers and want to know what they can do about it.

So, if a board feels that an investigation is warranted, what can they do legally? RCW 41.24.110 says that any medical staff being reimbursed by the BVFF & RO shall report his or her findings in writing to the local board and the state board. That means that the local board can request a report from any treating physician, and the physician must provide it. If the local board has questions about an injury, whether it is duty related, or whether appropriate treatment is being rendered, the local board should request further information or clarification from the doctor.

RCW 41.24.110 also says that "a physician or other medical staff, who is not approved by the local board, shall not receive or be entitled to any compensation". This means that the local board must approve all payments. It also means that, in extreme cases (and only with good, documented reasons), the local board may disallow certain physicians. Make sure that you keep good minutes at all of your meetings to document your actions and your reasons for those actions.

RCW 41.24.140 says that the local board may appoint a guardian when it feels it is in the best interest of the volunteer or his/her beneficiary. Local boards have sometimes had to do this in line of duty deaths when minor children inherited the

benefit, or when a volunteer has been incapacitated to such an extent that they cannot make good, sound decisions for themselves.

Local boards even have the authority to subpoena witnesses to testify on any matter. In that case, the chair of the local board would administer the oath.

The State Board relies heavily on the local board's opinion, and it relies on the local board to be its investigative arm. It is much better to have people close to the volunteer managing and investigation his or her claim. We feel that the local board has a personal, vested interest in the volunteer and can better handle the claim than someone who has never met the volunteer.

For the system to work, however, the local board must initially determine the validity of claims and treatments. We have sometimes had local board members call us and tell us that they don't believe a claim is valid and that we should deny it. If a local board does not believe a claim is valid, it must deny it at its level. If the case ever went to court, the judge would want to know why we questioned the legitimacy of a claim that the local board approved as being legitimate.

If you have any questions, or are uncertain what to do, please give us a call. We know that some of the work involved in processing a claim can be overwhelming, especially if you are new at it. We are here to help and to support local boards in any way we can.

Accident Reports

Due to popular demand, accident reports are now available online at www.bvff.wa.gov. Make sure that you keep a duplicate for your file. We must have original signatures, so you will need to print the form, fill it out, and mail the original to us.

Also, many departments are filing in the department's address on the line asking for the volunteer's address. It is important that we have a correct mailing address for the volunteer, and not the department, on that line.

WHERE DID THEY GO?

PAM AND BRIGETTE: Every newsletter, it's nice to give you an update on where we've gone. Since the last newsletter, we have traveled to Ariel, Lummi Island, Olympia, Okanogan, Curlew, Washougal, and Molson.

Brigette also was invited to pull a duty shift with the Pierce County Deputies. A special thanks to Heinz Stettinius for handling all of the arrangements. It was both important and fun to get a taste of what it is like to be a police officer. Brigette further extended her experience by attending WSRLEA's conference and learning how to use a LIDAR Radar Detector and participating in Defensive Training. At Pam's request, Brigette refrained from attending the Taser Training (Pam cited some fear of working if Brigette took that training).

JOE FAUBION: We are often asked for Joe updates. Sometimes we even wonder where Joe is. We should probably set up a Joe sighting hotline. Seriously, Joe does spend a lot of time traveling on his motorcycle. His most recent trip was planned to Texas, but he only made it as far as Vegas.

Currently, Joe is hunting moose in Canada. He tells us often how much he misses the firefighters, and how much he loves his retirement.

Commissioners as Firefighters

If your district allows its commissioners to also participate as volunteer firefighters, please make sure that your commissioners have unanimously approved a resolution allowing them to be volunteer firefighters.

Commissioners who are also active firefighters may participate in the BVFF & RO's relief and pension act, but only when they are acting as volunteer firefighters. They would still need to be covered by L&I for their commissioner duties.

Injury Claims

Have you ever felt that doctor's billing sheets are written in secret codes designed to keep local boards and the average person in the dark? Well, they probably are. But there is help out there. Recently, we have seen local boards approve birth control and Chlamydia tests. We're sure the local boards would not have willingly approved these charges if they had known what they were for.

If the billing sheet doesn't give you any clue about what is going on, try reading the doctor's report. It will often detail exactly what procedures the doctor performed. If there isn't an accompanying doctor's report, call his or her office and request one. Remember, the law says the doctor must provide a report.

There is also help online. On each billing statement, there is a diagnostic code. You can look up the code at <http://www.eicd.com/EICDMain.htm>. If there are diagnostic codes that are unrelated to a line of duty injury, there's a good chance some of the charges are unrelated as well.

You can also go online to look up the CPT codes to learn exactly what the charges are. You will have to register, but the web site address is: <https://webstore.ama-assn.org/>. Make sure you click on the free CPT Code/Value Search. You are limited to 10 searches a day, but that is usually enough to look up what you need.

Finally, if all else fails, or if you don't have access to the internet and the doctors' reports haven't helped, you can call us. We have code books in the office and can tell you what any of the charges are.

You might be a cop if...

You believe in a "public stupidity" law, for all those cases where nothing else fits.

BOARD MEMBER PROFILE



Ken Boad is our newest board member. He was appointed by the Governor in September. Ken has over 15 years experience as a volunteer firefighter for Mason County FPD #2, the City of Ocean Shores Fire Dept., and Whatcom County FPD #8. He also spent 27 years as a Washington State Patrol Officer. After retiring from the WSP as a Lieutenant, Ken took a position as the Assistant Chief of Mason County FPD#2. In his spare time, Ken has been working hard to restore a 1967 American LaFrance pumper.

Board For Volunteer Firefighters and Reserve Officers
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Annual Fees

Annual fees are due January 1, 2003 and are delinquent March 1, 2003. 2003's annual fees are as follows:

Reserve Officers and EMSD's:

\$90.00 for relief (disability)

\$120.00 for pension (\$30
member/\$90.00 municipality)

Fire Departments:

\$10.00 for relief (disability)

\$60.00 for pension (\$30.00
member/\$30.00 municipality)