
BOARD FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND RESERVE OFFICERS

June 2001

A Word from the Executive Secretary

Brigette K. Smith

Well, the new year is here and we have been busy! We have had the opportunity to travel to many departments across the state. We've been to Friday Harbor, Ferndale, Brewster, South Prairie, Royal City, Darrington, Shelton, Artic, Tumwater, Roosevelt, and Allyn (just to name a few). We have talked to firefighters, EMT's, commissioners, fire chiefs, administrative assistants, and Reserve officers. Everyone has made us feel welcome and reinforced our idea that we are helping the greatest group of people.

We look forward to traveling more in the future and really encourage all departments to call and invite us. We travel free of charge and present at your convenience. In order to reach firefighters, we know night presentations are necessary, so don't worry about scheduling us for an evening. We'd love to come.

BVFF Web Site

As of April, our new web site came on-line. We are still working some of the bugs out, but it seems to be helping many departments.

The web site allows downloads of Remittance Forms and Invoice Vouchers. It also allows on-line postcard submittal. No more stamps!! Once a postcard has been submitted, we will email your department (if we have your email address) and let you know that a card has been submitted.

You can also get information about the BVFF, access RCW 41.24, see copies of previous and current newsletters, and see a copy of the policy and procedures manual. Unfortunately, we cannot put retirement forms or accident reports online because of the signatures that are statutorily required.

We would welcome any suggestions to help make the web site better. Happy surfing!

Dual District Membership

We have had many questions lately dealing with dual membership. Some volunteers volunteer in two districts, or they are both reserve officers and volunteer firefighters. In cases like these, both departments must report and pay the disability fee for the individual. Only one district should pay for the pension.

It doesn't matter which district pays the pension, but we do ask that the same department pay the pension fee every year.

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You might be a Firefighter if...

*Your kids are afraid to get into water fights with
you.*

Remittance Form Questions Answered

Forms

Since forms can now be obtained from our office and on-line, we are asking that departments stop making their own forms. We realize that that was very helpful for many in the past since it was hard to get a form immediately before.

While this may have worked okay before, some departments have had to redo their forms. All forms are scanned into our computer database so small font sizes or different paper sizes become unreadable.

As a result, please use the forms provided and make sure to type in at least a size 12 font.

Reporting New Members

New members should be reported immediately. Some departments require an initial observation period before a new member is accepted into the department, and that is all right. If the potential member is acting in anything other than an observer, the disability fee should be paid. Unless a person has been reported and their disability fee paid, they are not covered in an accident.

Pension fees can be paid later, depending on your department policies.

Making up Missed Payments

A member can make up missed payments as long as they were reported for the year they are trying to make up and as long as that year is not prior to the first year they made a pension payment.

When making up a payment, there is an interest penalty of 1% per month. Often, it is easiest to call us and ask us how much it would cost to make up the payment. Many times we are asked who is responsible for paying that amount. The law is not specific, so it is up to the department and individual to work out who will pay what.

Who is Making the Payment?

Since 1996, it has been legal for the municipality to choose to pay the member's portion of the

pension fee. Because of this change, it is now very important to note on the remittance form who is making the payment. Member paid fees are refundable, but municipality fees are not.

Also, the pension system was originally developed to be used as a volunteer incentive. We encourage departments to set minimum standards for participation. For example, to be eligible for participation, a department could set the minimum standard at a minimum attendance of 50% of all drills and 50% of all calls.

Please, if you set minimum standards so some members do not qualify to make a pension payment for the year, let us know. We want to support the department's efforts, but we can only do this if we know that a standard is in place. Once we know that there is a standard and which members didn't meet it, we will block their ability to make up those missed payments.

Members Who Leave Service

Please notify us immediately when a volunteer leaves service. It is important in the retirement system to have a correct end of service date. If no date is provided, we end the volunteer's service on December 31 of that year. In many instances, this unfairly gives service credit to volunteers who haven't served for several months.

Additionally, when local boards review retirement forms, one of the things that they are certifying is that the end of service dates are correct. If they aren't, please notify us and change the end of service date on the form to the correct dates.

Beginning Service Date

It has always been our policy to list the volunteer's start date as the date the remittance form is received in our office. If your department would like a different date, please list that date on the form and provide documentation to reflect that date. The documentation could be an accepted application form or drill or call records.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS GET WORKPLACE PROTECTIONS

BY REP. CHRISTOPHER HURST AND REP. DAN ROACH

ONE OF OUR PROUDEST PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION WAS WORKING TOGETHER TO PASS A BILL THAT RECOGNIZES THE DEDICATION AND PERSONAL SACRIFICE OF VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS. THE BILL (HB 1420) WILL PROTECT THEM FROM BEING DISCHARGED FROM WORK, OR DISCIPLINED, WHEN THEY ARE ON LEAVE FIGHTING FIRES.

THE ISSUE WAS BROUGHT TO US BY A CONSTITUENT WHO WAS REPRIMANDED BY HIS EMPLOYER AFTER SPENDING 18 HOURS BATTLING A FOREST FIRE. AS WE RESEARCHED THE ISSUE, WE FOUND MORE INSTANCES OF VOLUNTEERS BEING PUNISHED, OR EVEN FIRED, BECAUSE THEIR NOBLE SERVICE OCCASIONALLY HAMPERED THEIR WORK SCHEDULES.

IT STRUCK US THAT VOLUNTEER FIRE SERVICE IS MORE THAN JUST A COMMUNITY SERVICE. MANY RURAL COMMUNITIES DEPEND ON VOLUNTEERS AS THEIR FIRST LINE OF PROTECTION AGAINST FIRES AND OTHER EMERGENCIES. HOWEVER, THEIR IMPORTANCE ISN'T LIMITED TO SMALL TOWNS.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS PERFORM A VITAL PUBLIC SERVICE IN EVERY COMMUNITY WHERE THEY ARE PRESENT. NATIONWIDE, ROUGHLY 75% OF THE FIRE PROTECTION CITIZENS RECEIVE COMES FROM VOLUNTEERS. IN WASHINGTON STATE, THERE ARE OVER 18,000 VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS.

SINCE VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE SO MUCH SERVICE TO OUR COMMUNITIES, WE FELT THEY SHOULD AT LEAST BE PROVIDED WITH THE SECURITY OF KNOWING THEIR JOBS WOULD BE SAFE WHILE THEY WERE OUT PROTECTING THEIR COMMUNITIES. SO WE JOINED TOGETHER IN A BI-PARTISAN EFFORT TO PASS THIS IMPORTANT BILL.

ULTIMATELY, THE BILL MADE IT THROUGH THE PROCESS AND LANDED ON THE GOVERNOR'S DESK TO BE SIGNED INTO LAW. THROUGH THE HARD WORK AND SUPPORT OF FIRE CHIEFS AND VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS THROUGHOUT THE STATE, WE WERE ABLE TO GET THIS BILL PASSED.

OUR FOREMOST HOPE IS FOR THIS LEGISLATION TO HELP KEEP OUR COMMUNITIES SAFE BY ENSURING THAT VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS CONTINUE THEIR DEDICATED SERVICE, AND THAT NEW RECRUITS CONTINUE BEING ATTRACTED TO THIS NOBLE AND IMPORTANT PURSUIT. YOU HAVE OUR THANKS, OUR APPRECIATION, AND OUR RESPECT.

Retired Members

Retired members cannot be active volunteers! It is not mandatory for members to retire at age 65, so they can volunteer as long as they and the department agree it is ok and safe to do so. A retirement pension cannot be drawn until they leave service, however. If a volunteer retires, begins to draw a pension, and changes their mind, they can return to active service. In that case, we must be notified immediately to end the pension. If we are not notified and they become active volunteers again, they will have to pay back all monies that were paid in error while they were both drawing a retirement and volunteering.

Governor Signs Bill Raising Volunteer Firefighter's Benefits

Volunteer firefighters who are injured in the line of duty will see their disability payments increased annually, thanks to a bill signed on May 14, 2001 by Governor Gary Locke.

House Bill 1004 was sponsored by Rep. Jeff Morris, D-Sedro Woolley and Mark Doumit, D-Cathlamet—both local volunteer firefighters.

“Since volunteers are not employees, they are not eligible for L&I benefits, so the Legislature established the Volunteer Firefighters Relief and Pension System (VFFRPS). However, the benefits paid by VFFRPS are set in statute and do not rise with inflation,” said Morris.

“This bill changes that. Benefits will now be increased annually at the same rate the Consumer Price Index increases.”

VFFRPS also provides survivor benefits for a volunteer who is killed in the line of duty. Morris' bill will increase those benefits as well.

"So many small communities depend on the dedicated volunteer firefighters," said Morris. "These folks take risks every day to protect our homes and families. Providing for them and their families, should they be injured or killed, is the least we can do."

I'll Show You a Volunteer

Show me a person who spends endless hours in training without pay, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person where a cry for help brings split-second dispatch, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who is devastated when lives are lost or maimed, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who is graciously welcomed as a next-door neighbor, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who often takes more ridicule than compliments, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person whose car is garaged with the grille facing out, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who sacrifices home life, T.V....even tender moments, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who may be asked to give more than just dedication, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Show me a person who is asked to give more...and more... and more, and I'll show you a volunteer.

Author: Foley

Reprinted with permission from the Atascocita Volunteer Fire Department, as submitted by Bryn Leiphart to <http://www.avfd.com/poems/>

BOARD MEMBER PROFILE



Dean Hills, our current board Chair, has been a member of the Board since 1987. He brought 28 years of volunteer service with Chelan Co. FPD #6 and the City of Cashmere fire departments. From 1983 through the present, he has served as chief in those departments. He is employed full-time by the Department of Transportation as a supervisor in the Leavenworth area.

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

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