
BOARD FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND RESERVE OFFICERS

June 2002

A Word from the Executive Secretary

Brigette K. Smith

In the December 2001 newsletter, I told you the story of Richard “Richie” Pearlman, one of a handful of volunteers killed during the WTC Attacks. Since telling his story, I have learned of several more volunteers who stepped forward to help rescue others, and lost their lives that day. Each is sad and unique. I am happy to report, however, that the body of Richard Pearlman was found on March 26, 2002, bringing closure to his family.

While so many changes have been happening in our nation, we continue to work hard to support the volunteer firefighters and reserve officers here in our office. It has come to our attention that many of you like to see where we have been. Since the last travel update in July 2001, we have seen firefighters, commissioners, chiefs, secretaries, and reserve officers in Ephrata, Marysville, Winlock, Wenatchee, Orcas Island, Spokane, Coupeville, Clarkston, Gardiner, Conway, North Bonneville, Lacey, Cathlamet, Lynwood, Cape George, and Stanwood. We are looking forward to meeting firefighters in Molson and Woodland soon.

Remember that we travel for free and at all hours to bring information to your firefighters and reserve officers. We can tailor our presentations to your needs, so we can support the local boards in their jobs. If you would like more information, or would like to set up a time for us to travel to your department, please call us.

As with newsletters in the past, we will focus our articles on common questions and concerns that we often hear in our office. If you have any suggestions for future articles, please let us know.

Physical Exams

Did you know that the BVFF will pay up to \$50.00 to ensure that each new FF/RO covered by our disability system has a physical exam to help departments determine if they are fit for duty? If your department is not yet taking advantage of this program, we encourage you to call us so we can help you get started.

What if we’ve been paying for the physicals ourselves? You can seek reimbursement for as far back as you can document having paid for new volunteer physicals.

What if none of our volunteers have ever had a physical? If your volunteers have never had a physical, they can begin now. As long as we haven’t paid for a physical since they’ve been with your department, we will still reimburse up to \$50.

What if a volunteer is new to us, but volunteered with a different department before and had a physical there? If a new volunteer has had a physical with a prior department, they are still eligible for another one with the new department.

What if the volunteer isn’t really new, but returned after a long leave of absence? A volunteer is eligible for a new volunteer physical after leaves of greater than six months.

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Remittance Forms Revisited

Your Annual Remittance Forms should reflect your membership as of January 1.

This is often confusing for departments. Any members who join after January 1 should not be reported on the annual form. A separate supplemental form should be completed for them. The Annual Remittance Form should be prepared on January 1 to avoid confusion. Remember, by law, the Remittance Forms are due on January 1st, and are **delinquent** March 1st. They are not due on March 1st. Statutory interest is charged beginning April 1st.

Birthdates are required for all participants seeking any coverage or benefits through the Board for Volunteer Firefighters. Participants must be over the age of 16 and active firefighters or commissioned reserve officers to be covered.

Departments must pay the disability fee for all eligible participants regardless of the amount of time they volunteer. We are often asked whether the disability fee has to be paid for a participant who was only there for two months or two weeks. Whether they were there for one week or the whole year, the disability fee must be paid. Also, this fee must be paid right away. Any time there is any risk that a new volunteer firefighter (FF) or reserve officer (RO) could be injured, their disability fee needs to be paid.

Payments count for the calendar year, not a year of service. For example, a participant joins the department in November. The FF/RO must be reported on a supplemental remittance form and the disability fee paid. The fee will provide the coverage for the firefighter until December 31 of that same year. As of January 1, the disability fee must be paid again. Disability fees are not transferable between participants.

Often, departments will hire new FF's/RO's and begin their training immediately. A remittance form is usually made up. Then the department waits for the next commissioner/city council meeting to approve payment. Once approved, the department has to wait for the city or the county to issue a check. By the time it is received in our office, the volunteer has been drilling and responding to emergencies for two months. That is two months that the volunteer has been in danger, but has had no disability coverage if they are hurt. Currently, departments have the

ability to report new members by faxing us a completed remittance form (our fax number is 360-586-1987) with an added notation that the fees are to follow. We would just need to receive the money within a reasonable amount of time and prior to paying any claims. For those departments that have a credit balance, fees could immediately be deducted from credit. This gives coverage to volunteers until all the paperwork and payment is processed.

Finally, many departments have become much better about notifying us when members leave service. Keep up the good work! If you are still not reporting end of service dates, please do so. All it takes is a little note faxed, emailed, or mailed to us with the participant's name, social security number, and end of service date.

Disability Compensation

During last year's session, the legislature passed a law giving annual Cost of Living Allowances to Line of Duty Death Spouses and participants on short-term and long-term disability each July 1st.

Participants are eligible for short-term disability for the first six months that they are unable to work at their regular profession as a result of their fire or law enforcement duties. This year's benefit will increase from a maximum of \$2,627.92/mo. to \$2,719.94/mo. In order to claim their benefit, we will need proof of earnings, a doctor's letter excusing them from work, and a completed invoice voucher.

Participants are eligible for long-term disability after the first six months of an injury if they are completely disabled and unable to work in any job for compensation or profit. This year's benefit will increase from \$1,323.96/mo. to \$1,359.97/mo. (plus additional money for a spouse and dependant children). To claim their benefit, we will require periodic doctor's reports stating that they continue to be completely disabled and unable to work at any job. The frequency of these reports varies depending on the prognosis and extent of injury.

The spouse of a FF/RO killed in the line of duty will see their annual pensions increase from \$1,323.96, plus an additional \$114.22 for each dependant child, to \$1,359.97 plus an additional \$117.33 for each additional child. Spouses continue to receive this pension until their death or until they remarry. Departments should notify us immediately if they are aware of a Line of Duty Death Spouse intending to remarry. We can convert their pension to a lump sum, but only if the paperwork is completed prior to their remarriage. This can also be done for Line of Duty Death Spouses that are terminally ill.

BVFF WEBSITE

We are constantly updating our website. If you haven't visited it yet, we encourage you to. It is our way of trying to make your jobs easier. Whether you want a resource for information, to download forms, or to find contact information, the site should have something for everyone.

Available Forms:

- Invoice vouchers (MS Word)
- Remittance Forms (MS Word & Excel)
- Physician's Report (MS Word)
- Physician's Letter of Introduction (MS Word)
- Electronic Accident Postcard submission

Resources & Contact Information:

- Biographies for Staff & Board Members
- Fire Service Links
- RCW's
- Policies & Procedures Manual
- Newsletters (current & archived)

Our latest addition has been the Physician's Letter of Introduction. Since physicians do not frequently have to deal with the BVFF, there is often a lot of confusion in billing matters. We strongly suggest that departments begin to use this letter to introduce the system to physicians who will be treating injured firefighters. We hope that the use of this letter will help the departments, the volunteers, and the doctors to process claims more smoothly.

www.BVFF.wa.gov

Accident Statistics for the Year 2001

Top 5 Types of Accidents (out of 285 total accidents)

- 18% - Sprains from falls
- 16% - Back injuries, usually from lifting
- 9% - Contusions and abrasions
- 9% - Exposure to Communicable Diseases
- 8% - Lacerations
- 8% - Heat Exhaustion
- 6% - Eye Injuries

Top 5 Locations of Accidents

- 29% - At fire scene
- 21% - At aid call scene
- 10% - At the fire station
- 10% - At training academy
- 7% - At Drill

BVFF Legislative Update

Governor Signs Bill Eliminating Volunteer Firefighter Membership Limit

Volunteer fire departments that found it difficult to provide good fire suppression coverage when restricted to 25 firefighters per thousand population will soon have an easier time.

In the past, several departments (particularly in Eastern Washington) have had a difficult time covering many square miles of land with few firefighters. This problem can be increased when departments must limit their volunteer firefighter membership based on the area's population. Anyone can see where this would make a difficult situation for large, sparsely populated areas.

Thanks to Representatives Broc Jackley (D), Joyce Mulliken (R), Hans Dunshee (D), Val Ogden (R), Jim Dunn (R), Alex Wood (D), and Sarah Casada (R), departments will not be required to limit their membership according to their population as of June 13, 2002.

BVFF and WSRLEA Working Together

The Washington State Reserve Law Enforcement Association will be holding its annual training conference in Tacoma from August 22 through August 25. The Board is tentatively scheduled to teach two classes on August 24th.

If your department is covered for either disability or pension by the BVFF, or is considering our coverage, we encourage you to attend. We will discuss what our benefits are, how to access those benefits, and why departments should make the change. Bring your questions and concerns!

We certainly look forward to meeting new people and seeing old friends. Last year's conference was a lot of fun. It included a radar detector class, bike patrol training, meth-lab training, and (one of Brigitte's favorites) a live SWAT team demonstration.

For more information on the conference, please contact Heinz Stettinius at 253-752-9616 (cell: 253-219-1385, email: oldfield@harboret.com) or Joe Patton at 253-875-6130 (cell: 253-208-4692, email: jobpat@msn.com).

BOARD MEMBER PROFILE



Ronald Ayres has been a Board Member since 1999. He is currently the Chief of Walla Walla County Fire Protection District #4, where he served as a volunteer firefighter from 1970-1984 and career firefighter from 1984-1990. He also served as a volunteer firefighter with Walla Walla #8 from 1985- 1998.

Board For Volunteer Firefighters and Reserve Officers
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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 easy to tell that an injury was caused by a participant's fire or law enforcement duties. Other times, the local board may need to investigate either the claim or the treatment being received.

So, if a board feels an investigation is warranted, what can they do legally? RCW 41.24 gives local boards the power to require reports from medical staff, to approve or disprove physicians and treatments, to subpoena witnesses, and to appoint guardians.

In the next issue of our newsletter, we will take a more in depth look at this issue. If you have any questions in the meantime, please give us a call.