



INTEGRITY,
SERVICE,
TRUST

COMMISSIONERS

- Frank Mestemacher
- Larry Metz
- Mike Noblet

South Whidbey Fire/EMS

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www.swfe.org

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 SWFireEMS

 @SWFEMS

FLASH POINT

Newsletter

Winter 2021

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

By H.L. "Rusty" Palmer, Fire Chief

We continue to be grateful that you allow us to serve you. Our emergency responders, volunteer and career, continue to do a great job of protecting our community and themselves when they go on calls. I also want to recognize our Administrative staff who all work very hard to ensure our department runs smoothly. I am proud of each of our hard working members.

Our challenges this year have been similar to those we faced last year. Our calls for service continue to rise slightly over last year. Costs continue to rise and materials and supplies are often in short supply. We recently received a federal grant to offset many of the costs of our COVID response, which greatly helps.

We have also applied for an Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) to replace our 75 aging self-contained breathing apparatus, one of our most important tools. We will also soon apply for an additional AFG grant to assist us with hiring full-time firefighters. While our chances are good, these competitive grants are no sure thing. If unsuccessful, we will continue to find ways to reduce costs and reallocate funds to help cover these important needs.

We continue to make progress on our Strategic Plan. You can find our most current update on the status of that plan by visiting our website at www.swfe.org. We will continue to keep you updated on our progress and appreciate hearing your ideas and concerns. Please visit our website to learn more, or contact me at 360-321-1533 or chief@swfe.org with questions.

COVID-19 SAFETY TIPS

Even though more of us have access to vaccines, many are still unvaccinated. COVID variants are complicating vaccine efficacy as well. It is imperative that we continue to protect each other by following the basic principles of COVID safety. Until the large majority of us are vaccinated, we can still be in control of our exposures. Even if you have had the vaccine adhere to the following:

- The individuals that qualify for the vaccine is ever changing, so get the vaccine as soon as it is offered to you;
- Engage in physical distancing, stay at least six feet away from other people ;
- Wear a cloth face coverings in all public places when not eating or drinking, and safely recreating with social distancing of at least 6 feet;
- Stay home if you are unwell, avoid others who are sick, always cover cough/sneezes;
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water (or use hand sanitizer if soap and water unavailable);
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands; and
- Disinfect surfaces and objects regularly.





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VACCINATION CLINICS

While still lacking, vaccines are starting to arrive in larger quantities here in Island County. The department is partnering with Whidbey Health and Island County to stand up clinics here on South Whidbey. The department is assisting with roles such as set up/take down, check-in, runners, wait area attendants, and traffic control/parking. In addition, thanks to our Medical Program Director, Dr. Krystal Baciak, EMT Basics have been authorized and trained to administer the vaccination. This gives the department the opportunity to assist at a greater level.

We are currently in the planning stages for a large scale drive through clinic. Provided we can work out the myriad details, we hope to offer it later this spring.

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

By Larry Metz,
Fire Commissioner



Here at SWFE, like all fire departments, safety is the highest priority for both our citizens and our first responders. As we start the new year, we are all still looking at safe practices regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. Living with these practices has many more of our island residents staying home, and this resulted in an increased number of responses in 2020.

With more stay-at-home time, let's not forget some of the safe practices we always strive to live with such as smoke detectors. You have heard over and over to change your smoke detector battery every six months.

An easy reminder is when we move our clocks ahead for daylight saving time in the Spring and back to standard time in the Fall.

Did you also know that smoke detectors have a shelf life? The U.S. Fire Administration says most detectors today have a life span of 8 to 10 years before needing replacement. The test button only confirms that the battery, electronics and alert system are working, it doesn't mean the sensor is working. It is recommended that you replace your smoke detectors every **10 years**. They do not last forever, even if they never go off.

This past holiday season saw the need to do things differently, specifically the Santa Drive-through at fire station 36. Thank you to all who volunteered to keep the tradition alive with some innovative thinking for a safe and happy experience. While we held our December Commission meeting on line, we were able to hear the music in the parking lot. It sounded great.

A big **"Thank You"** also to our seven new volunteer hires for 2021, as well as to our seven newly-graduated EMTs who finished the class in 2020. Your service is greatly appreciated.