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South Whidbey Fire/EMS

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 SWFireEMS

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FLASH POINT

Newsletter

Fall-Winter 2019 –2020

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

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

I want to start this edition of our newsletter by saying thank you. South Whidbey Fire/EMS could not do its work without the support of our community, and we are extremely grateful.

Call volumes continue to increase an average of 10% per year, and we are struggling to meet this demand. Most calls (80%) are for emergency medical service, which reflects our aging population. (Myself included!) To top it off, we have lost almost 30% of our volunteer emergency responders due mainly to the high cost of living on the island.

Where does this leave us? Often, we must rely on mutual aid from neighboring fire districts which can take longer to reach you in an emergency. Our community insurance rating also was downgraded last year as a result of staffing and apparatus issues. This rating is directly tied to how much you pay in homeowner insurance premiums.

The fire district is in the process of updating its Strategic Plan that identifies service level issues. What's clear is that our community needs more emergency personnel to respond to calls. We also need to replace apparatus that is aging and unreliable. Doing both will improve response times, emergency medical service, and our community insurance rating.

The fire district likely will consider asking voters to approve a lid lift to fund these needs. The estimated cost is 30 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value, or approximately \$10 per month for the owner of a \$400,000 home. That means the fire levy on your property tax statement would change from 65 to 95 cents per \$1,000. In contrast, our fire levy was \$1.00 per \$1,000 in 1990.

We will have more information to share before a final decision is made to go to ballot, and hope that you will take part in these discussions. In the meantime, we wish you and your family a safe and happy holiday season.

SANTA IS COMING!

For 25 years, South Whidbey Fire/EMS has helped Santa visit the south end spreading holiday cheer. Santa rides in a sleigh pulled by a fire engine, visiting neighborhoods and grocery stores with holiday safety information and a candy cane treat. All routes will start at 6:00 p.m. and end between 7:30 and 7:45 p.m. Here's our Santa's Sleigh schedule for December:



Monday, December 16 - Freeland and Bayview with stops at Payless Foods and ending at The Goose Grocer.

Wednesday, December 18 - Scatchet Head and Deer Lake with scheduled stops at Bailey's Corner Store and ending at Ken's Corner Red Apple

Friday, December 20 - Cedar Vista, Campbell Road, Wilkinson Road and scheduled stop at Clinton Foodmart and ending at the Star Store.

While Santa is visiting the communities, his elves distribute holiday safety information and a candy cane treat. For complete routes and any weather related updates, please check our website, Facebook, or Twitter pages.





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FIRE SAFETY TIPS FOR WINTER

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Colder months mean more time indoors with friends and family. Follow these simple tips to prevent fires before they happen and enjoy the holiday season!

Have Your Furnace Checked – Invest in hiring a professional to come and inspect your furnace annually. It's always better to know when something is not working properly than to have it abruptly break down in those cold winter months when you need heat the most.

Inspect Chimneys and Vents – Fireplaces can produce creosote which has the capability of igniting. If your family has a fireplace, have an annual chimney inspection to make sure that there are no hazards capable of starting a fire. It's important to always remember that when burning wood, use dry, seasoned wood which produces more flame with less smoke.

Test Smoke Alarms – You always want to double check that your batteries are fresh and will last you through the winter. Always place smoke alarms in the kitchen, bedrooms, and the laundry room.



Screen Your Fireplace – Either a metal screen or tempered glass will suffice to protect any sparks from leaving the fireplace. Still, you always want to make sure to keep kids and pets at least three feet away from a burning fireplace.

Candle Caution – Candles can be easily knocked over by kids or pets. Only light candles when you are alert and able to watch them, blowing them out whenever you intend to leave the room.

Beware of Space Heaters – Avoid placing heaters near curtains, tablecloths or other flapping fabrics. Always make sure your space heater has an automatic shut off switch, which forces the heater to quit as soon as it reaches a dangerously high heat level.