

# Fact Sheet

The National Volunteer Fire Council is a non-profit membership association representing the interests of the volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services. Organized in 1976, the NVFC serves as the voice for the volunteer fire service. The NVFC is the volunteer fire service's representative in the national policy arena and on numerous national and international committees and organizations. Each state firefighter's association elects a representative to the NVFC.

We welcome you to browse our website at [www.nvfc.org](http://www.nvfc.org) to learn more about the volunteer fire service and information regarding membership, training, legislation and meetings.

This Fact Sheet was produced in order to provide an overall picture of today's volunteer fire service.

- **Volunteers comprise 73% of firefighters in the United States.**  
Of the total estimated 1,064,150 volunteer and paid firefighters across the country, 777,350 are volunteer.<sup>1</sup>
- **Communities served by Volunteer Firefighters depend on them to be their first line of defense for many types of emergencies.**  
Volunteer Firefighters are summoned to a wide array of emergencies across the country every day including fires, emergency medical incidents, terrorist events, natural disasters, hazardous materials incidents, water rescue emergencies, high-angle and confined space emergencies, and other general public service calls. The public relies on Volunteers to be their first line of defense in these emergencies. Volunteers spend an enormous amount of time training to prepare for these emergencies.
- **The majority of fire departments in the United States are volunteer.**  
Of the total 26,354 fire departments in the country, 19,224 are all volunteer; 3,845 are mostly volunteer; 1,407 are mostly career; and 1,878 are all career.<sup>2</sup>
- **Services contributed by Volunteer Firefighters save localities across the country an estimated \$36.8 billion per year.**<sup>3</sup>

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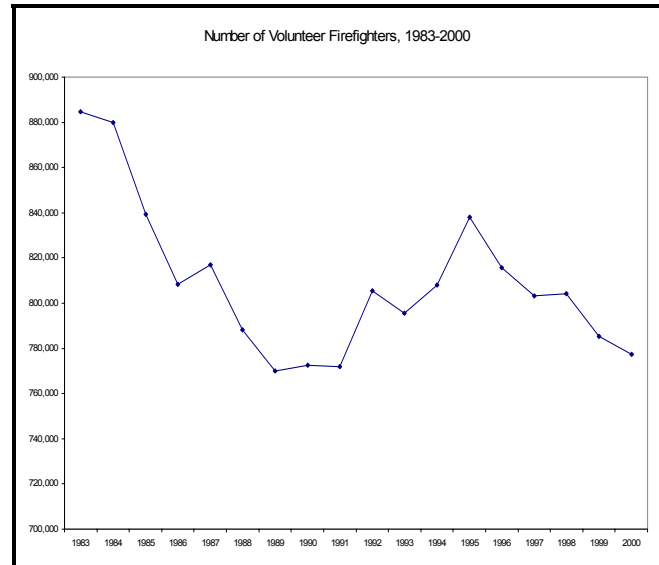
<sup>1</sup> *U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2000*. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, Massachusetts, December, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Fire Protection in Rural America: A Challenge for the Future*. National Association of State Foresters, 1993.

- **The number of Volunteer Firefighters in the United States has declined 5-10% since 1983.**

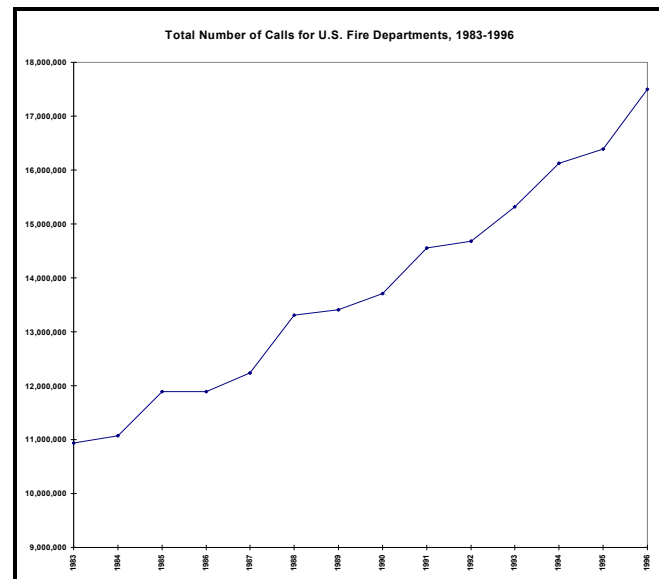
Major factors contributing to the decline include increased time demands, more rigorous training standards, and the proliferation of two-income families whose members do not have time to volunteer. The two greatest sources of increased time demands are increased emergency calls and increased training hours to comply with training standards.



- **Recruitment and retention of Volunteer Firefighters** is one of the key issues being addressed jointly by the NVFC and U.S. Fire Administration. The NVFC and USFA have released a report entitled *Recruitment and Retention in the Volunteer Fire Service: Problems and Solutions*. The NVFC also has adopted the *1-800-FIRE LINE* recruitment campaign. Under this campaign, individual states connect to the toll free number which prospective volunteers can call for information about volunteer emergency service opportunities.

- **Fire department call volumes continue to increase.**

Most fire departments across the country have experienced a steady increase in calls over the past decade.<sup>4</sup> This is a major source of the increased time demands on Volunteer Firefighters. The increase in calls, coupled with the decline in the number of Volunteer Firefighters, means that fire departments are having to do more with less. Most of the increase is attributed to a sharp increase in the number of emergency medical calls and false alarms. The number of fire calls has actually declined over the period.



<sup>4</sup> U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2000. National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, Massachusetts, December, 2001.

- **Small and mid-sized communities rely heavily on Volunteer Firefighters.**  
Small communities (those with populations under 10,000) across the United States are typically protected by all volunteer departments. In some cases, however, these communities have hired a few paid firefighters to assist. Mid-sized communities (those with populations above 10,000) are typically served by combination volunteer and paid departments. Large communities (those with populations over 100,000) are most often protected by combination volunteer and paid departments that consist of primarily paid staff. There are very few purely paid fire departments in the United States, but those that exist are primarily found in very urban areas.

*Volunteer and Paid Firefighters in the U.S. by Population Protected, 2000<sup>5</sup>*

| Population Protected | Volunteer | Paid   | Total   |
|----------------------|-----------|--------|---------|
| Under 2,500          | 402,550   | 9,750  | 412,300 |
| 2,500 to 4,999       | 156,000   | 6,550  | 162,550 |
| 5,000 to 9,999       | 105,000   | 14,750 | 119,750 |
| 10,000 to 24,999     | 74,750    | 43,950 | 118,700 |
| 25,000 to 49,999     | 20,550    | 38,850 | 59,400  |
| 50,000 to 99,999     | 6,900     | 39,950 | 46,850  |
| 100,000 to 249,999   | 3,800     | 40,000 | 43,800  |
| 250,000 to 499,999   | 2,600     | 25,850 | 28,450  |
| 500,000 to 999,999   | 5,100     | 35,900 | 41,000  |
| 1,000,000 or more    | 100       | 31,250 | 31,350  |

- **64 of the 102 firefighters who died in the line of duty in 2000 were Volunteers.<sup>6</sup>**  
The leading cause of death was heart attacks, followed by vehicle accidents.
- **Volunteer Firefighters and Emergency Medical Technicians across the country meet national and/or state training standards.**  
Each state adopts its own training requirements that apply to Volunteer Firefighters. Many states require that volunteers meet the National Fire Protection Association's *Standard 1001: Firefighter Professional Qualifications*. This establishes a very rigorous course of classroom and practical evolutions for basic training. This same standard is commonly used to train paid firefighters.  
  
Likewise, volunteer emergency medical responders are trained to the national training criteria establish by the U.S. Department of Transportation and other standards setting bodies.
- **Volunteers invest a large amount of time serving their communities.**  
There is no national average of the amount of time a Volunteer Firefighter gives to his or her community. Volunteering in the fire and EMS service, however, is one of the most demanding volunteer activities today. Time commitments include operational responses (often at a moment's notice), training, fund raising, vehicle and station maintenance, and various administrative duties.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Firefighter Fatalities in the U.S. 2000*. U.S. Fire Administration, Emmitsburg, Maryland, 2001.

- **The cost to train and equip a firefighter is approximately \$4,500.**  
Below are average expenses associated with firefighting:

*Equipment*

|                                    |          |
|------------------------------------|----------|
| Protective Clothing                | \$ 1,000 |
| Self-contained Breathing Apparatus | 2,500    |

*Training*

|                                      |           |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Firefighter I-II                     | \$500     |
| Emergency Medical Technician - Basic | 300       |
| Hazardous Materials Awareness        | 75        |
| Emergency Vehicle Operator           | <u>75</u> |
|                                      | \$ 4,450  |

- **Firefighting and emergency medical equipment is very expensive.**  
The cost of firefighting equipment is listed below. Equipment can range in cost depending on features and specifications.

|   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| Fire pumper                             | \$150,000 - \$300,000 |
| Ladder truck                            | \$350,000 - \$500,000 |
| Ambulance                               | \$60,000 - \$110,000  |
| Advanced life support medical equipment | \$15,000 - \$20,000   |

- **There are more than 2 million fires reported each year in the United States.<sup>7</sup>**  
Many others go unreported, causing additional injuries and property loss.
- **Approximately 4,500 people die in fires in the U.S. annually.<sup>8</sup>**  
An estimated 26,500 people are injured.
- **Direct property loss due to fires is estimated at \$8.5 billion annually.<sup>9</sup>**
- **Each year, fire kills more Americans than all natural disasters combined.**
- **Fire is the third leading cause of accidental death in the home; at least 80 percent of all fire deaths occur in residences.**
- **Volunteer Firefighters serve on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Urban Search and Rescue Teams.** Several of the US&R Teams such as Fairfax County, Virginia and Montgomery County, Maryland include volunteer members. US&R Teams have been deployed to disaster scenes both nationally and internationally.

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<sup>7</sup> *Fire Facts*. U.S. Fire Administration Web Page.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*