

SEATTLE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Author: Aly Pennucci

Update: February 1, 2016

BACKGROUND

The Seattle Fire Department (SFD) became a full-time, paid professional firefighting organization in 1889, following the Great Seattle Fire. The SFD provides fire protection and prevention, technical rescue, and emergency medical services for the City of Seattle. It deploys engine companies, ladder companies, aid and medic units, and fireboats to mitigate the loss of life and property resulting from fires, medical emergencies, and other disasters.

This paper summarizes and describes SFD's (1) physical and personnel resources, (2) mission and services, and (3) departmental organization.

DEPARTMENT RESOURCES

Today, the SFD manages an annual operating budget of approximately \$184 million and 1,167 Full Time Equivalent employees. In 2016, adopted appropriations to SFD account for approximately 17 percent of the City's General Fund. After the Seattle Police Department and Parks Department, SFD receives the third highest General Fund appropriation.

The City maintains 33 fire stations that are organized into five battalions, serving all City of Seattle residents and responding to more than 88,000 alarms each year. Each battalion serves specific [geographic areas](#): the downtown/Central Area, north and northeast Seattle, northwest Seattle, south and southeast Seattle, and West Seattle.

In addition to battalions serving specific geographic areas, there is a Medic One battalion that

Table 1: SFD Resources (2012)¹

Personnel			
Uniformed		1,071	
Civilian		81	
Total		1,152	
<i>Daily Staffing</i>		<i>207</i>	
Stations and Apparatus			
Fire Stations	33	Medic Units	7
Engines	32	Air Units	2
Ladder Trucks	11	Fire Boats	4
Aid Units	4	Hose Wagon	1

provides advanced life support services citywide. Illustrative details on personnel, stations, and apparatus from 2012 are set out in Table 1. All uniformed personnel are represented by the International Association of Firefighters.

Emergency medical responses account for approximately 84 percent of all fire emergency calls. In order to respond to the emergency medical demand, all firefighters are trained as emergency medical technicians

to provide basic emergency medical care, or basic life support.

In 2012, SFD developed a [five-year strategic plan](#) to provide policy direction. The plan included an evaluation of the SFD deployment model. As part of this, the department conducted a risk assessment to forecast demands for Emergency Medical Services (EMS). A definitive conclusion of the risk assessment is that EMS is an ever increasing portion of the department's workload.

¹ Source: *Seattle Fire Department Strategic Plan 2012-2017*.

The majority of EMS growth is in the central part of the city. The downtown neighborhoods make up about five percent of the city's land area, and are projected to account for 32 percent of all EMS incidents by 2017.

SFD staffs seven medic units. Two of the seven are trained to provide more advanced medical care, or advanced life support. Additionally, the department has four aid units staffed by firefighters to provide citywide emergency medical response coverage, or basic life support. EMS services are funded, in part, by operating revenue from the King County Medic 1 / EMS Levy, which has successfully been renewed seven times since its inception in 1979. In 2014, the levy was renewed for an additional six years for \$695 million over the levy term.

Replacement and improvements to neighborhood fire stations and other facilities were most recently funded through a \$197 million Fire Facilities Levy. That levy expired at the end of 2012. SFD has identified ongoing capital needs for four new facilities: (1) relocation of the current headquarters in Pioneer Square, (2) development of land and marine based units in South Lake Union, (3) development of a training annex in north Seattle, and (4) expansions and upgrades to the existing joint training facility in southwest Seattle. Capital funding for these facilities are yet to be identified.

DEPARTMENT MISSION AND SERVICES

The mission of SFD is to save lives and protect property through emergency medical service, fire and rescue response, and fire prevention. Beyond this key mission, firefighters do much more than fight fires. They provide a wide variety of services within the community such as:

- Physically inspecting commercial and multi-residential buildings for fire safety violations.
- Ensuring fire permit requirements are complied with and current.
- Providing emergency medical services and advanced medical assistance via the Medic One program.
- Performing non-emergency service calls such as assisting with flooded buildings and homes.
- Providing stand-by medical support at large public events such as concerts and sporting events.
- Assisting the Seattle Police Department with the cleanup of clandestine drug labs.
- Actively participating and/or sponsoring a variety of community events, organizations and fundraisers.
- Providing outreach and education to raise general awareness on issues of fire safety.
- Providing "walk-in" blood pressure screening at neighborhood fire stations.
- Giving free fire station tours upon request.

DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION

Diagram 1 illustrates how the department is organized and how the staff members are dispersed throughout the agency. While each budget cycle offers an opportunity for SFD to make organizational changes, the basic structure of the department typically remains the same.

The department is organized into four major divisions: Operations, Fire Prevention, Resource Management and Administrative.

1. *The Operations Division*, commonly referred to as Fire Suppression, is the largest division within SFD. This division is responsible for providing emergency medical services, fire suppression, mitigation of disasters, and rescue activities. This division is comprised of four platoons within six battalions of firefighters who work an alternating schedule of 24-hour shifts. Other administrative and support staff throughout all four divisions typically work a regular eight hour day, five days a week schedule.
2. *The Fire Prevention Division*, commonly referred to as the Fire Marshal's Office, provides services intended to prevent loss or injury from fire. Services offered by the Fire Prevention Division include: public education; systems testing to ensure that fire and life safety systems throughout the city are inspected by certified technicians; certification for individuals who install, inspect, test or maintain fire protection and life safety systems per the Seattle Fire Code; construction inspections and plan review to ensure that buildings under construction and those being remodeled are in compliance with the Seattle Fire Code; permit issuance and fees collection for special events, public assembly occupancies, and storage or use of hazardous materials; and fire investigations to determine the cause and origin of certain fires.
3. *The Resource Management Division* provides internal services to SFD. These include recruitment and training of uniformed staff; health and wellness services; and communications and logistical support.
4. *The Administrative Division* provides management information and allocates and manages available resources needed to achieve the SFD's mission.

In addition to these major divisions SFD also has a small unit that accounts for expenditures that can be reimbursed through grants, donations, or bequests, such as federal grants for apparatus replacement.

Diagram 1: Seattle Fire Department – 2015 Organizational Chart

