

2009 Annual Fire Department Report

The Westhampton Fire Department had another busy year in 2009 providing emergency services to the community. The Department responded to one-hundred and sixty-one calls for service this year. These calls for service were for fire suppression, emergency medical services, hazardous materials response, motor vehicle accidents, utility wires down, residential fire alarm activations, and many more.

In addition to these emergency responses, three-hundred and twenty-five inspections and permits were completed and issued throughout the year. These inspections and permits include smoke detector and carbon monoxide inspections, underground storage tank removals, installation of oil burners and propane tanks, and issuing burning permits and fireworks display permits. The fire department has concentrated on preventative efforts throughout the community the past few years in an effort to help minimize loss of life and property and sustain a volunteer department with low operational costs. Every year we evaluate how to safely and effectively reduce the call volume within the community. This year, again, we worked with the Westhampton Elementary School system and installed protective covers over each of the fire alarm pull stations to minimize false alarms or malicious activations.

One of the greatest challenges faced by volunteer departments across the country is the recruitment and retention of department members. Greater demands on training, increasing call volumes and the balance of a full time job and family all require a delicate balance that can minimize the number of people interested in becoming a member. The Town of Westhampton has been very fortunate over the years, given the difficulties seen by other departments, to maintain this type of department and the high level of performance and services provided by these individuals. The department currently has thirty-two volunteer members and is always seeking new members to help serve the community.

The department's fleet of apparatus consists of a 2004 Engine, a 1986 Engine, a 1990 garage truck cab and chassis with a milk truck body converted into a Water Tanker, a 2002 Brush Truck, and a 2009 Rescue Truck. All vehicles are checked by Department personnel on a weekly basis to ensure a state of operational readiness and reliability. In addition, the Town's Highway Department has been a tremendous asset to the Fire Department, completing all routine maintenance, fluid changes, and upkeep of the vehicles. The vehicle maintenance program, as established, helps to prolong the expected life-span of the vehicles and improve the safety during emergency responses. Again this year, we had both Engines professionally pump-tested to ensure adequate pump performance as determined by the manufactures. These testing procedures are also reflected in the Departments Insurance Services Organization (ISO) rating and meet the requirements set by National Standards pertaining to Fire Apparatus.

The Department also had all of the fire hose pressure tested to ensure adequate operational effectiveness. National Standards recommend that this is done once a year, and in addition, it is reflected in the ISO ratings that this testing procedure be done to minimize the insurance rates in Town. More important, to ensure the safety of all members utilizing fire hose during operational procedures, it is our responsibility that they are provided with equipment that is safe and functioning to the highest standards. The testing revealed that the Department did have fire hose in service that did not pass the required pressure rating. These were removed from service and replaced with some of the spare hose that was tested and passed the requirements. These testing requirements demonstrated that this was a project that was needed and should be continued each year to help ensure the integrity and operational capacity of the equipment is maintained.

One of the programs we instituted this year was the installation of smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors in residences throughout the community. The Department applied for a grant and received over three-hundred smoke detectors that were distributed throughout the community and installed by Department personnel. We teamed up with members from the Council on Aging and developed a list of individuals over the age of sixty that needed either new detectors or needed assistance in testing their current detectors. Over the course of four months, members from the Department went around the community installing every smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector. It is these types of preventive efforts that have the greatest positive impact on our

community. It is challenging and extremely difficult with an all-volunteer fire department to respond as quickly as needed. However, these types of proactive measures will continue to assist the homeowners and provide earlier detection and notification to provide everyone more time to remove them from a hazardous and dangerous atmosphere prior to our arrival.

The Department continues to be vigilant for any other funding sources available for Fire Departments. Over the course of the past three years, the Department has received over \$375,000 in competitive grants and other funding sources outside of our regular operating budget funded from the tax base. This amount is twenty-three times our annual operating budget. We also have a grant pending to replace the vehicle that is currently being used as a Water Tanker that was originally a garbage truck with a milk truck body on it. The replacement of this unit continues to be a priority for the Department because it is being used for functions that it was not originally designed, creating operational and safety issues. Although these competitive grant funds provided an additional revenue source over the past few years, we still have many areas that still need improving for providing the safety to the community and emergency responders that are expected. These grant funds allowed the Department to procure equipment and resources that were needed ten years ago.

In 2009, the Town voted to appropriate \$74,000 for the purchase of a new Rescue Truck. The Department took delivery of a new 2009 GMC 4500 Rescue Truck that replaced a 1982 bread truck that was used as a supply vehicle to carry the rescue equipment to emergency scenes. This vehicle also responds too many of the medical calls throughout the Town as it is equipped with all of the necessary medical equipment. Many of the members in the Department worked extremely hard and diligent on this vehicle and enabled the Town to get a brand new vehicle for about half of the cost if it was bought directly from a dealer. Everyone in the Department thanks the Town for their support in this project and this was a great reinvestment for the community in emergency services for the future.

There are a number of capital projects that the Fire Department is going to need input and support on from the community in the immediate future. The largest of these is a need for a new Public Safety Complex to meet the growing demands of the community. The current facility is reaching sixty years old and no longer is able to accommodate the demands placed on the Public Safety Services (Police, Fire, EMS, and Emergency Management). In addition, one of the Fire Engines is twenty-three years old and has an expected life span of twenty-five years. However, no new engine available will fit in the current facility given the current parameters. All of these items were also forwarded to the Town Capital Improvements Committee with emphasis placed on a new building. We will continue to explore all available funding options to minimize the financial impact on the community, but the conversation needs to continue in order to plan and prepare for vehicles and equipment for the next ten to twenty-five years and a facility that will continue to meet the service demands for the next fifty plus years.

The members of the Westhampton Fire Department continue to do much more than respond to emergencies. Throughout the years, they continue to clean residents chimneys each fall, hang the flags on the utility poles in the center of town when needed, get involved in community sponsored events such as the Halloween parade, fill residents swimming pools and the water tanks at the Town Cemetery, install smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors, and put up house numbers for residences to help emergency responders find the proper location and decrease response times. The Westhampton Fire Department is one of the few healthy and vigorous volunteer departments left in the region, and all of the members are very dedicated and proud to serve the residents and community.

We would all like thank our fellow residents for your continued support throughout the year in helping to make our job easier. We strive to improve our knowledge and services to help make Westhampton a safer community to live in. Through our members values of professionalism, honesty, integrity, compassion, and dedication we will continue to meet the needs of the residents and remain "Committed to the Community". Have a great year and stay safe.

Christopher W. Norris, Fire Chief