

FIRE WATCH



WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE FIRE SEASON IS OFF TO AN EARLY START

When we think of wildfires, California or Eastern Washington might come to mind. Unfortunately, wildfires are becoming a growing threat here in Western Washington. According to the Department of Natural Resources, during the second week of March there were 54 wildfires in Washington State with 53 occurring on the west side of the mountains. This is an unusually high number of fires before the traditional peak fire season of late August to early October. Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), where homes meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland vegetation, poses a danger with warmer and drier conditions. In the VRFA service area, where we have several WUI areas, there have already been 17 brush fires this year. We have seen the annual number of brush fires grow steadily over the past few years from 87 in 2016 to 138 in 2018.

WHAT IS THE VRFA DOING TO PREPARE FOR THIS SUMMER'S FIRE SEASON?

In 2018, the VRFA training division secured a private industry expert to assist in providing WUI training. The training focused on the role of structural engine companies in the wildland urban interface. The training showed ways to coordinate resources, manage hose lines and operate safely when mitigating a brush fire in a housing development. Building on this in 2019, the South King County Fire Training Consortium has hosted several training sessions focusing on deploying hose lines to help slow the movement and growth of larger brush fires, while protecting homes and other buildings that may be threatened by fire.

The VRFA also has twenty firefighters who are "Red Card Certified" in wildland firefighting.



In order to receive and maintain their red card, each year firefighters must complete continuing education, demonstrate fire shelter deployment proficiency and complete a fast paced three-mile walk wearing a 45-pound weight vest in 45 minutes or less. This year three of our red card firefighters will attend a course in Pierce County focusing on WUI.

Firefighters with a red card can also be deployed to assist with fires outside of our service area. In 2018 we responded to eight major wildland fires, including two out of state mobilizations to California. We have already deployed to one wildfire in southwest Washington this year.

In addition to well-trained staff, the VRFA utilizes specialty equipment including a brush truck located at Station 34, and a recently added 2,500 gallon type II support tender/water tanker. [see right sidebar]

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To address the growing need of wildland urban interface fires and lack of water tenders in the South King County area, the VRFA purchased a 1991 Pierce International 2,500 gallon pumper from a small fire department in Michigan. It has 14,970 original miles and is in good overall condition. Its purpose is to provide water and/or be a water source for engine companies during large brush/wildland fires in areas that lack fire hydrants. It will also be a resource for Washington State on strike team deployments.



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WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE FIRE SEASON IS OFF TO AN EARLY START - CONTINUED



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT YOUR HOME AND PROPERTY IF WILDFIRE STRIKES YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

There are many things you can do to reduce your risk of fire and to protect your property should a fire occur in your neighborhood or near your home. There are three ignition zones around your home; the Immediate Zone (0 to 5 feet), Intermediate Zone (5 to 30 feet) and the Extended Zone (30 to 100 feet).

In all three zones it is important to maintain vegetation, trim branches that overhang the roof or porches and remove plants containing resins, oils and waxes. In the Immediate Zone consider using non-combustible materials such as crushed stone and gravel.

OTHER STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO REDUCE YOUR RISK INCLUDE:

- » Clear off dead leaves, pine needles and anything that can burn from your roof, gutters, decks, porches and patios.
- » Seal any openings such as roof and attic vents that embers could get into using wire mesh screening.
- » Trim shrubs or tree branches that come within five feet of your home.
- » Keep your grass trimmed, especially if it is dry.
- » Remove any flammable materials from underneath decks and porches.
- » Store wood piles away from your home.
- » Store away outdoor furniture cushions when not in use.
- » Develop, discuss and practice an emergency plan with everyone in your home. Be sure to include your pets in the plan. If you need to leave your home, shut all doors and windows on your way out to keep embers from getting inside.

FIREWORKS REGULATIONS & SAFETY

The VRFA serves the cities of Algona, Auburn and Pacific. All three cities have local ordinances that address the purchase and discharge of fireworks within their respective city limits. Specific information can be found in your city ordinances, or at www.vrfa.org.

The discharge of all fireworks is illegal in the City of Algona. Both Auburn and Pacific limit discharge on the 4th of July from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The types of fireworks that are allowed are very limited. A good rule-of-thumb is the adage "if it goes up or blows up, it is not allowed." The specific types of fireworks that each city allows are listed in their respective ordinances.

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PLEASE TAKE THE FOLLOWING PRECAUTIONS WITH ALL FIREWORKS:

- » Use only approved, legal, and common fireworks from reliable, licensed retailers.
- » Always have a responsible adult light all fireworks.
- » Have a charged garden hose or a fire extinguisher handy.
- » Use fireworks under outdoor conditions only, away from buildings, houses with wood shingles, trees, and dry fields.
- » Avoid aerial type fireworks.
- » Light one item at a time, move away quickly, and keep a safe distance away.
- » Dispose of used fireworks by first soaking them in water.
- » Ensure the safety of pets.
- » Use eye protection.
- » Remember your neighbors and clean up all debris.
- » If a device does not light or fire, an adult should wait at least a minimum of five minutes before approaching the device.
- » Rather than buying fireworks, attend a public fireworks display when available and make that a family tradition.



FIRE CHIEF'S MESSAGE



BRENT D. SWEARINGEN

This edition of VRFA's Fire Watch is the first issued since the retirement of Administrator Eric Robertson. Administrator Robertson was the founding chief executive of the Valley Regional Fire Authority and spearheaded the formation of the current fire department. In addition to successfully merging two fire agencies, he integrated multiple annexation areas and took over fire protection for those areas. He also oversaw extensive building and upgrading of the facilities, fleet and policies and procedures. Most importantly, he hired many of the exceptional people that make the VRFA the premier fire agency that it is today.

After Administrator Robertson announced his intention to retire at the end of 2018, the VRFA Board of Governance offered me the position of Chief Executive of the Authority. My name is Brent Swearingen, and I had been the VRFA's Deputy Chief of Operations for the prior seven years.

By way of introduction, Administrator Robertson hired me away from the Reno, Nevada Fire Department where I had worked since 1984. At that department, I had worked my way up through the ranks and had been a chief officer

since 1996. During that time, I was a hazardous materials technician, training officer, rope rescue technician, and served as a union president for 13 years. My educational achievements include a bachelor's degree in business, a master's degree in homeland security studies from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, and a Master's certificate in alternative dispute resolution from the University of Denver. Prior to my fire service career, I have been a blackjack dealer, diesel mechanic, U.S. Army Russian translator, and a farm hand. I have four grown children and live with my beautiful wife, Lori on a small hobby farm in the Lake Retreat area.

meet industry standards. All business practices are being mapped and streamlined. The list goes on, but the end result of the two-to-three year process is a third-party evaluation and confirmation that everything we do is to the highest standards. Perhaps a good analogy of this process is getting your house ready to sell. You look at everything critically, clean out the attic and garage and fix all the little things that you may not have noticed while you were busy living there.

While we examine those things we commonly do, we are aggressively improving our wildland

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I have had a lot of good fortune in my career and been afforded many opportunities. I can honestly say that being a part of this organization and the communities we serve is my greatest satisfaction.

Administrator Robertson left the VRFA in great shape. We still face challenges and are working diligently on many levels to prepare for the future. We are examining every aspect of our organization. A select team is making great strides in preparing the department for accreditation. This process forces us to list out every risk in the community and identify how we are going to respond. Every function of the department is stress-tested and revised to

program, our Community Medical Team partnership, and looking at new opportunities to partner with our neighboring agencies to provide better services at less cost.

Please check out the rest of our newsletter for summer safety tips, especially as they relate to wildfire and fireworks safety.

We work hard to provide the safety and security your families deserve and thank you for the outstanding support you have always shown us.

Have a fun and safe summer!

VRFA EMPLOYEES HONORED AT ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET

Several employees were honored at the VRFA annual awards presentation on March 1, 2019, at Auburn's Community and Events Center.



SCOTT MCFERON

Firefighter First Class Scott McFeron received the 2018 Firefighter of the Year award. Nominated by his peers, McFeron was commended for dedicating much of his time off to develop and staff benevolent activities

that raise funds for community projects, such as "Operation Warm" which provides coats for children in need. He was also recognized by co-workers for his calm demeanor in tough situations, his dedication, selflessness, dependability and teamwork. McFeron began his career in April of 2010 and currently works at North Auburn, Station 31.

"Whether Scott is organizing a benevolent event, or providing reassurance to one of our customers on their worst days, we all find comfort and confidence that he is working alongside us," said one of his fellow firefighters.

Captain Guy Smith was chosen as the Fire Officer of the Year for 2018. Smith began his career with the VRFA in January of 2008 and works out of our North Auburn Headquarters



GUY SMITH

Station 31. According to his crew members, he is very skilled at his profession and holds his crew to the same standards, while putting their needs above his. He was recognized for his teaching style, professionalism and leadership as a member of the VRFA truck committee where he instructs staff from VRFA and neighboring jurisdictions in specialty ladder truck operations. Nominations for Smith also included commendations for his courage and contributions during several impactful emergency responses in 2018.



NOAH CHANG

Data Analyst Noah Chang was presented the VRFA Professional Excellence Award for his significant contributions to several projects and programs. Most notable was a community risk analysis and streamlining VRFA input for the National Fire Incident Reporting System. Noah started his career with the VRFA as a Systems Specialist in

Information Services in August of 2010. His co-workers comment that Noah is great to work with and willing to assist anyone at any time.

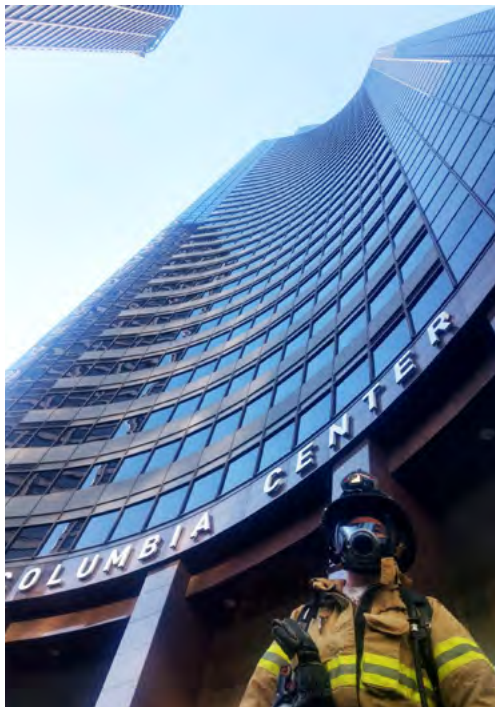
"Noah's work is always to the highest standard. His talent, knowledge and ability will help the VRFA take great strides now and into the future," said Deputy Chief Kevin Olson.

In addition to the award winners, three retirees were honored. Administrator Eric Robertson led the VRFA for twelve years, guiding the organization through the process of becoming the first regional fire authority in the state, among many other significant achievements. He retired December 31, 2018.

Battalion Chief Rudy Peden retired in April 2018, following 41 years in the fire service. He worked in many different areas including the Water Rescue Team, Technical Rescue Team, Hazardous Materials Team and Fire Investigation. He also spent time as a Battalion Chief in the Training Division.

Also retiring in 2018 was Captain Paul Carolan. Paul began his career with the Auburn Fire Department in 1991, and was promoted to Captain for the VRFA in 2011. He served as a Planning and Logistics Captain and received many accolades for his work mentoring newer firefighters, especially in his role as a Training Officer for the South King County Fire Training Consortium.

THE VRFA GIVES BACK



28TH ANNUAL LLS SCOTT FIREFIGHTER STAIRCLIMB

On March 10th, seventeen members of the Valley Regional Fire Authority participated in the 28th Annual Leukemia and Lymphoma Society Scott Firefighter Stairclimb at the Columbia Tower in Seattle. All seventeen members completed the climb and the team raised over \$18,000 for blood cancer research.

AUBURN AREA SERVICE CLUBS

Several VRFA members give back to the Algona, Auburn and Pacific communities by participating in local service clubs and committees that address different needs in the community. These include:

- » Fire Chief/Administrator Brent Swearingen and Battalion Chief Paul Strong are both members of the Kiwanis Noon Club. This club focuses on serving the needs of children in the Auburn area while supporting programs that positively impact children all over the world. Members are active in the community completing service projects and participating in fundraisers that benefit children's organizations.
- » Deputy Chief Kevin Olson is a member of the Blue Ribbon Committee for Auburn. The mission of this committee is "to optimize the health and well-being of

all through education, participation and innovation." The committee is made up of a large group of volunteers from health and education agencies. DC Olson is on the subcommittee for "Healthy Weight in Adults and Children." This committee has been focusing on healthier options for kids at local restaurants.

- » Deputy Chief Dave Larberg is a member of the White River Valley Museum and Mary Olson Farm board. Their mission is to preserve and share the history of the South King County area through the operation of the museum and operation of the Mary Olson Farm, a 67-acre, late 19th century farmstead east of the Green River.
- » Chief Financial Officer Mark Horaski is a member of the Auburn Rotary. While the International Rotary club focuses on polio eradication, the local Auburn club is active in raising funds for scholarships for local students. Over the years they have distributed over \$1 million in scholarships. They also have a partnership with the Auburn School District.
- » Public Information and Education Officer Kelly Hawks is a member of the Auburn Valley Kiwanis Club. Their mission is to serve the needs of children in the Auburn area as well as providing support to programs that impact children all over the world. The club sponsors a golf tournament called "Helping Kids Out of the Rough" in early August. Monies raised from the tournament support programs throughout the year.
- » Public Information and Education Officer Kimberly Terhune is a member of Soroptimist International of Auburn. Their mission is to improve the lives of women and girls through programs leading to social and economic empowerment. Club giving includes: Shelter for Sisters which provides financial assistance to women escaping domestic violence, scholarships to head of household women who are pursuing education to provide for their families, Domestic Abuse Women's Network [DAWN] and the Auburn Area Fire Medic Campaign. The Soroptimist club holds a Crab and Brew Fest each year in February to raise funds to support their giving goals.

WWW.VRFA.ORG



VRFA Services

The VRFA provides CPR and First Aid classes, complimentary blood pressure checks, fire station tours, custom-fit bicycle helmets, custom-fit life jackets, smoke alarms, child car seat inspections and more.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

call **253-288-5800** or go to **www.vrfa.org**

VRFA Administration

- Brent Swearingen**
Fire Chief/Administrator
- Kevin Olson**
Deputy Chief of Operations
- Dave Larberg**
Deputy Chief of Technical Services
- Mark Horaski**
Chief Financial Officer

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