



Yakima County Fire Protection District No. 5

SERVING 700 SQUARE MILES

TODD LUNNING
CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD

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BOARD MEMBERS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Yakima County Fire District 5 “Sounds the Alarm”

Fire district struggling to provide an adequate response

Zillah, Wash. – Yakima County Fire District 5 sent a letter to all residents in December outlining areas where improvements are needed to continue providing an adequate emergency response. District 5 covers 800 square miles from White Swan to Grandview making it the largest fire district in the state geographically.

“Based on the amount of area we cover, we require more stations, apparatus and firefighters compared to other fire districts,” said Chief Ken Shipman. “We have prided ourselves on never asking for a tax increase. Now we require additional funding to continue providing emergency services residents require.”

District 5 was formed in 1947. The Fire District is struggling to provide adequate facilities, apparatus and staffing to respond to call volumes. There is also the regular threat of wildland fires in both populated and unpopulated areas. Preparing to fight those natural disasters is expensive, requiring specialized apparatus and equipment.

In addition to full-time firefighters, the Fire District has a long tradition of relying on volunteers to respond to calls to cover its large service area. Recruiting and retaining volunteers is a huge challenge for most rural fire districts, including District 5. Volunteering requires a significant time commitment and the Fire District is secondary to work, family and other commitments volunteers may have.

Adequate facilities are an important part of attracting and retaining volunteers. Current facilities do not allow firefighters to sleep overnight at a fire station, which delays the Fire District’s emergency response. Renovating some fire stations is a necessity to provide effective emergency services for residents.

In the past year, the Board of Fire Commissioners developed a Strategic Plan to address capital and operation needs. The goal was to identify challenges to service, needed revenue and develop a plan that would reduce impacts to taxpayers.

For capital items, the Strategic Plan calls for renovating fire stations in Harrah (Station 3), Parker (Station 5), and Zillah (Station 10) and expanding the emergency dispatch center (Station 13). It also includes replacing some fire engines and wildland fire apparatus that has reached the end of its usable life. These capital projects would require a bond that the fire district is considering placing in front of voters sometime in 2023.

For operations, the Fire District is considering a fire levy increase sometime in 2024 or later to hire additional emergency personnel. Volunteers require flexibility as they juggle family, full-time jobs and/or school. Fewer volunteers leave gaps in coverage for residents, which results in overtime costs for paid staff that is expensive for taxpayers.

It takes a few years to complete station renovation projects and take delivery of emergency apparatus from the time they are ordered. That's why District 5 wants to stagger these funding requests so taxpayers aren't paying for stations and firefighters that aren't in service.

"Volunteers are the backbone of District 5. We couldn't save lives and property without them," said Chief Shipman. "This requires adequate facilities, apparatus and equipment to improve outcomes for the people we serve."

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Yakima County Fire District 5 provides fire suppression, prevention, emergency medical service and a wildland fire response to 36,000 people over 800 square miles from. District 5 is proud to be a "combination department" relying on volunteers, part-time and full-time emergency personnel to respond to calls. Visit www.ycfd5.org to learn more about the fire district. We also welcome volunteer applications on line or by contacting our main office at (509) 829-5111.