

Wasatch County Fire/EMS

Growing Pains, Part II

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My last article provided information about the rapid growth of Wasatch County and its effect on providing Fire service. In this article, I will touch briefly on who the Wasatch County Fire is and what our current staffing and resource capability is. This information will lay out the groundwork for the future article about how important it is to have an adequate, quick response to all 911 calls.

Wasatch County Fire started out as the Heber Valley Fire Department in 1921 to provide fire protection to the citizens of the Heber Valley. In 1987 the Wasatch County Fire Protection District was organized to provide fire coverage throughout the county to the communities of Heber, Midway, Wallsburg, Charleston, Daniels, Independence, Hideout, and the unincorporated areas of the county. Back then, EMS was managed by Heber Valley Medical Center, and in 2000 Wasatch County created Wasatch County EMS and assumed management of the EMS services. Volunteer Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), trained to basic and advanced levels, provide service and have responded to thousands of calls; and the demand on that service continues to grow. Today, Wasatch County Fire and Wasatch County EMS work together by sharing resources in order to improve the response. Having Fire and EMS work together provides more qualified personnel to operate as both firefighters and as part of medical response teams. Many of the EMS personnel have been crossed trained to the Firefighter I National Standard and firefighters have crossed trained to be EMS certified. This combined effort of fire/EMS is a nationally accepted operating model and is practiced in nearly every community across the country.

Currently, Wasatch County Fire is made up of 18 full-time employees, including the fire chief, the fire marshal, two battalion chiefs, and one wildland warden, several Captains and Lieutenants and one administrative assistant who serves in multiple capacities including the public information officer. The remaining staff consists of 25 volunteers.

To provide both fire/EMS service, five fire stations are strategically placed throughout the county (see table below). All the fire stations house fire vehicles and equipment and ambulances. Other specialized vehicles and equipment are housed in the stations to support different needs. For example, a hazardous materials response unit is housed at the Jordanelle Station and a heavy rescue vehicle and a ladder truck are housed at the Heber City Station. All the stations have some support vehicles along with some command staff vehicles. Although the stations are equipped with the necessary types of vehicles and equipment, they are not all staffed. The only complete full-time staffing (24/7) occurs at the Jordanelle Station, where three firefighter/EMTs are housed 24/7 x 365 days per year. The Heber City Station operates with three full-time firefighter/EMTs from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. daily. For calls after 6:00 PM each night volunteers are paged and respond. When dispatchers receive a 911 call for all other areas other than Jordanelle, volunteers are paged and respond from their homes to the Heber station or the remainder of the cities in the unincorporated areas of the county. Midway and Timber Lakes rely solely on volunteer availability for the first response. Regardless, any on-duty personnel and volunteers are paged for the response. Although this type of response generally works it cannot be sustained as the demand on services continues to grow. The commercial development alone increases the demand and that along with rapid growth in the population exceed the response capability. Multiple 911 calls at the same time and supported with minimal staffing create some of the toughest challenges possible for our

current operating model. Strategic plans include methods to increase the full-time staffing and their response capability as soon as possible to meet the growing need, but we will need a great deal of support from the community to make those changes. We must be able to reduce response times for any incident, and we must be able to launch an effective deployment of resources within a short period of time in order to increase life safety and reduce property loss.

Did you know that when someone suffers a heart attack, the chances of survival increase if a trained medical team can arrive at the scene and begin treatment in four minutes or less? It takes a minimum of four to five trained personnel to assist the patient for a good outcome. Ideally, up to eight responders should be on the scene to assist in management of that patient and transportation to the closest hospital. In another example, if a fire is reported in a modern residential structure, fire growth can exceed the capability of our current response within five minutes or less from the time of report. Therefore, if a well-trained team of three or four firefighters arrive at a reported structure fire with at least two additional back-up teams of three to four each, within four to six minutes then the possibility of saving lives and controlling the fire in the structure increases exponentially. Our goal is to meet or exceed this type of response and meet the expectations of the entire community but to do that we need to move aggressively at making changes that improve the future of our community.

Wasatch County Fire /EMS Current Staffing Configuration

Stations	Location	Staffing	Type of Service
Heber City	#80 West 100 South Heber City, Utah	3 full-time firefighter/EMTs. Volunteers respond for overnight coverage.	Fire/EMS. Staffed from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. daily and is augmented by volunteers. After hours calls may be delayed if volunteers are not available.
Jordanelle	10420 North Jordanelle Blvd. Jordanelle Basin, Utah	3 full-time firefighters/EMTs.	24/7 x 365 days, Fire and EMS. Responds to all other areas within the county to support initial response. Limited number of firefighters for structure fire initial arrival.
Wallsburg	130 East 300 South Wallsburg City, Utah	Volunteer only—coverage improves for overnight response as volunteers are close to the station.	Fire/EMS. Volunteers report to the station and then respond to the scene in the appropriate apparatus. If volunteers are delayed then response is compromised.
Midway	100 West 32 North Midway, Utah	Volunteer only.	Fire/EMS. Volunteers report to the station and then respond to the scene in the appropriate apparatus. If volunteers are delayed then response is compromised.
Timber Lakes	2085 Timber Lakes Drive East Heber, Utah	Volunteer only.	Fire/EMS. Volunteers close in the area report to the station and then respond to the scene in the appropriate apparatus. If volunteers are delayed then response is compromised.

With this background about Wasatch County Fire/EMS, the next article will illustrate what needs must be met in order to keep Wasatch County one of the best and safest.