

Senior Fire Volunteer Program

Senior citizens aged 55 and older who volunteer for the city of **San Marcos, California** (55,000), fire department provide a range of services that allows firefighters to focus on responding to emergencies.

Leadership/staffing

The program is overseen by a battalion chief/fire marshal and currently has a full complement of 14 volunteers aged 55 to 80.

Timeline

The program began in 2003, at a time of budget and staffing constraints, and it responded to the need to increase fire station security.

Budget/funding

The city spends approximately \$100 per volunteer per year for uniforms and supplies. Funding for a car used by the volunteers was donated, and the city recently provided money to purchase a new van for the program.

Program description

Seniors who want to join the program fill out an application that is similar to a job application, and they complete a fingerprint and background check and an interview. Those who are accepted spend one week in a mini training academy, with classes taught by firefighters and managers. They learn about all of the jobs in the department, and they tour all relevant city facilities. They are trained in basic first aid and CPR and learn how to operate several kinds of equipment.

Volunteers are not required to put in a minimum number of hours, but most work about 10 hours a week:

- Volunteers have pagers and share responsibility for being available 24 hours a day to respond to emergencies. During a fire, these volunteers set up a shelter, retrieve equipment, provide food and drink, and refill oxygen tanks for firefighters' breathing apparatus.

- Volunteers add new fire hydrants and addresses of hydrants to all maps in the department.
- One volunteer distributes free smoke detectors and provides education on the importance of using smoke detectors in the home.
- When maintenance must be done on a fire station, a volunteer remains in the station while the work is being done so that firefighters are free to carry out their regular duties.
- When the department uses a backboard to transport someone from an accident scene, a volunteer picks up the backboard from the hospital the next day.
- A volunteer delivers mail to all fire stations.

To thank the volunteers for all they do, the firefighters' association pays the fee for volunteers and their spouses to come to the department's Christmas dance. Volunteers are also recognized by the city council, and their badges and awards are presented in front of the council. Every year, the department reports to the council and the community on the number of hours the volunteers provide.

Results

In 2004, volunteers performed more than 4,000 hours of community service. Volunteers benefit from the program by performing meaningful, engaging activities that keep them connected to the community. Fire safety employees can now concentrate on their first-in response tasks. All citizens receive increased fire services without increasing the fire budget.

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