

31617 1st Avenue South
Federal Way, WA 98003



THE FIRST RESPONDER

A South King Fire Publication

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit #1
Seattle, WA
ECRWSS
POSTAL CUSTOMER

Serving the citizens of Greater Federal Way and Des Moines

MESSAGE FROM CHIEF VAN VALKENBURG

FALL 2024



One of my core values as fire chief is strengthening community engagement. Over the past six months, we've attended more than 35 community events, including farmers markets, open houses, and coffee shop chats.

Every day, we aim to provide our communities with exceptional service. I want to acknowledge our firefighters' dedication, selflessness, and unwavering commitment to help keep our communities safe.

Recently, we achieved the goals of our 2022 comprehensive hiring plan. I'm pleased to share that all newly recruited firefighters are fully trained, and we're already seeing the positive impact. With more firefighters on duty, we're better prepared to meet the rising demand for fire and emergency services. Looking ahead to 2025, we will hire additional firefighters to fill vacancies created by retirements.

As days grow shorter and winter weather approaches, please take extra care to watch out for pedestrians. I urge everyone to be mindful of students walking to and from school, and/or waiting at bus stops, especially with daylight saving time approaching.

October is also Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and our firefighters will be wearing cancer awareness t-shirts to highlight a cause deeply personal to us, as cancer remains a leading illness in the fire service. In November, we'll honor Veterans Day, recognizing those who've served in the military, including the many active and retired veterans within our ranks whose service and contributions enrich our department.

As we prepare for the 2025 budget, I invite community members to attend our open meetings, where you can gain insight into our budget process, priorities for the upcoming year, and how we manage and allocate your resources. Your input is valuable as we continue to serve you.

Finally, with call volumes rising, we remain focused on robust budgeting and staffing plans to meet these challenges. I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to our communities for your continued trust and support. The passage of the Fire Benefit Charge (FBC) allows us to move forward with our plans to grow and strengthen our services. Your support makes this possible, and we are dedicated to serving you with excellence.

Dave Van Valkenburg,
Fire Chief

"We are meeting our goals, but as we move into 2025, our ability to increase frontline firefighter staffing will be constrained by bed space. To hire more firefighters and add resources, we need additional room," says Chief Van Valkenburg. "This is one of the reasons we decided to purchase a headquarters building—to relocate the admin and support teams out of the station and create more space for firefighters." See page 2 for more details.



South King Fire members, including Firefighter Dupras and Engineer McKenney (pictured), were deployed with WA Task Force 1 to assist in rescue efforts for Hurricanes Milton and Helene. District Chief Andersen, Lieutenant Nielsen, and Firefighter Duval were also deployed, in partnership with Pierce County Emergency Management.



2	CAPITALIZING ON EXISTING RESOURCES TO MEET GROWING DEMAND/NEW FIRE EXPLORER PROGRAM LAUNCHES
3	NEW MOBILE INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE PROGRAM/WINTER SAFETY TIPS
4	SANTA PARADE RETURNS/VOTERS APPROVE A BETTER PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: CAPITALIZING ON EXISTING RESOURCES TO MEET GROWING DEMAND

With emergency calls increasing by 54% over the past decade—and projected to keep rising—South King Fire (SKF) leadership has been proactively planning to meet current and future demands. This planning focuses on adding firefighters and support personnel, as well as ensuring that facilities are adequate to handle the growing demand.

A review of current facilities revealed that existing fire stations lack the necessary space for additional firefighters and equipment. Leadership explored various options and identified an immediate solution: centralize support staff in one location and allocate more resources—staffing and equipment—to Fire Station 62 on 1st Avenue. This has two key benefits:

1. It will provide space for future response crews, helping to address the rising call volume, particularly in the south end of Federal Way, where the need is greatest.
2. By centralizing core support staff functions in one building, SKF will achieve greater coordination and efficiency.

To implement this solution, SKF purchased an office building on 333rd Street in Federal Way, formerly known as the Olympic Office Center. The purchase of this building, along with future upgrades to Fire Station 62, will be funded by the sale of approximately 20 acres of unused property on 320th Street. (This property has been relisted for sale after a previous offer in 2022 did not move forward.) Funds generated from the property sale can only be used for capital projects.

Therefore, the most viable solution was to sell the property, purchase a building for centralized operations, and upgrade the existing fire station.

SKF will be sharing the recently purchased Olympic Office Center building with existing tenants, with an estimated move-in date in 2025, following renovations to meet the fire department’s needs.

These property changes ensure we will be well-equipped to meet the continued growing needs of our communities, providing enhanced emergency response and operational efficiency for years to come.



The purchase of the Olympic Office Center will centralize core support functions and free up space at Fire Station 62 for more firefighters and equipment in the future. Conveniently located off 333rd Street, it is near the City of Federal Way, Federal Way Police Department, and Federal Way Public Schools.

SHAPING TOMORROW’S HEROES: NEW FIRE EXPLORER PROGRAM LAUNCHES



We are excited to announce our new Fire Explorer Program. Fire Explorer Post #39 is designed to give young people in our community a unique opportunity to explore the fire service and build positive relationships with mentors. This innovative program aims to engage youth, ages 16 to 21, in meaningful activities that promote leadership, responsibility, and community involvement.

The program offers participants a chance to learn about the firefighting profession through hands-on training, job skills development, and educational opportunities. Through structured mentorship and career guidance, they will gain valuable resume building skills used for job applications and interview techniques, in addition to CPR/first aid certification. This will prepare them for future careers in emergency services or other professional fields.

A highlight of the program is the “ride-along” component, where Explorers who meet performance requirements will have the chance to ride along with firefighters during non-hazardous operations, observing firsthand the work involved in protecting the community. Explorers will also participate in civic events in the City of Des Moines and the City of Federal Way, further strengthening their connection to the community.

Recently, the Explorers toured the facility and were outfitted with full bunker gear, including uniforms, boots, and helmets. They were also provided with essential tools like flashlights, safety glasses, hoods, and gloves. During the tour, they learned about the history and significance of the uniform, and the pride that comes with wearing it. They are currently practicing turnout drills and gaining a deeper understanding of discipline and professionalism, key aspects of the firefighting profession.

Our program is more than just a career exploration opportunity—it’s a chance for youth to develop as future leaders while making a positive impact in their neighborhoods. Through this initiative, we hope to inspire and empower the next generation of community-minded individuals.

MEET OUR FIRE EXPLORERS

Charles (Charlie) Goode is 16 years old, and a sophomore at Silas High School. Goode is considering continuing at Tacoma Community College upon graduation for EMS training. They are currently a member of Scout Troop 219, reached the rank of Star, elected to membership in the Order of the Arrow, and went through the Ordeal in June.

Cooper Green is 16 years old and attends Stadium High School and Tacoma Community College. Green enjoys mountain biking, snowboarding, and many forms of art. “As of recently, I have enjoyed the Explorer Program,” says Green, “and I am excited to see where it takes me.”

Joseph Greenside is a student at Decatur High School. Greenside has some previous experience with volunteering for an aquarium and other various community events. They like playing video games and enjoy literature and reading too.

Kingston Lindsey is a junior at Decatur High School. When asked what their best qualities were, Lindsey said: “Overall, I’d like to think I’m like everyone else, but some qualities about me would include: always doing the best I can, not doing things alone, and a last strong one to mention would be that I enjoy being more physically active when involved with work.”

NEW MOBILE INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE PROGRAM FOCUSES ON PREVENTION, COMMUNITY WELLNESS

We are proud to announce the launch of our Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) program!

MIH is an innovative program aimed at enhancing community health and wellness by empowering residents through mobile healthcare resources. By extending our services beyond traditional emergency response, we can provide proactive, patient-centered care to address complex health issues and improve healthcare delivery.

Key Features of the MIH Program:

- **Alternative to Emergency Services:** Offers residents alternative solutions to emergency room visits for non-emergency situations.
- **Collaborative Care Coordination:** Partners with local healthcare providers, social services agencies, and community organizations to facilitate seamless coordination of care.
- **Community Health Education:** Utilizes care coordinators and community care nurses to educate residents on health and wellness topics and empower them to make informed decisions about their health.
- **Complex Care Assistance:** Provides support for individuals with complex health needs, ensuring they receive tailored care and resources.
- **Home Visits:** Conducts in-home visits to assess living conditions and needs, provides health education, and establishes follow-up care plans.
- **Outreach through Referral:** Identifies high-risk individuals, such as frequent Emergency Medical Services (EMS) utilizers and seniors, to offer proactive health assessments and interventions.
- **Preventive Care:** Delivers preventive services directly to residents in their homes, helping to identify and address health issues before they escalate.



MIH personnel includes (from left to right) Lily, Care Coordinator; Tamara, Social Worker and Care Coordinator; and Celi, Registered Nurse.

The MIH program began in July 2024 and provides an opportunity to enhance community health outcomes, optimize resources, and improve emergency response effectiveness. By addressing the underlying healthcare needs of the community, SKF aims to reduce the strain on emergency services while fostering a healthier, safer, and more resilient community.

WINTER'S COMING! MAKE SURE YOU'RE READY WITH THESE SAFETY TIPS

Put a **FREEZE** on Winter Fires

Home fires occur more in winter than in any other season. As you stay cozy and warm this winter, be fire smart!

<p>Half of all home heating fires occur in December, January and February.</p>	<p>Heating equipment is involved in 1 in every 6 home fires and 1 in every 5 home fire deaths.</p>	<p>Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet from any heat source like fireplaces, wood stoves, radiators or space heaters.</p>
<p>Keep portable generators outside, away from windows, and as far away from your home as possible.</p>	<p>Install and test carbon monoxide alarms at least once a month.</p>	<p>Plug only 1 heat-producing appliance (like a space heater) into an electrical outlet at a time.</p>
<p>Have a qualified professional clean and inspect your chimney and vents every year.</p>	<p>Store cooled ashes in a tightly covered metal container, and keep it outside at least 10 feet from your home and any nearby buildings.</p>	

BE PREPARED: BUILD AN EMERGENCY KIT

Have you checked your emergency supply kit recently? Make sure you have enough supplies to last a couple days in case of an emergency.

<p>First Aid Kit</p>	<p>Food & Water</p>
<p>Flashlight & Extra Batteries</p>	<p>Can Opener</p>
<p>Cell Phones & Chargers</p>	<p>Pet Food & Supplies</p>
<p>Blankets & Sleeping Bags</p>	<p>Picnic Supplies</p>
<p>Wet Wipes & Sanitizer</p>	<p>Extra Cash & Clothing</p>



For more information on how to prevent winter fires, visit usfa.fema.gov/winter and nffa.org/winter.

SANTA PARADE RETURNS TO SPREAD HOLIDAY CHEER

Our fifth annual Santa Parade is coming soon, continuing our tradition of spreading holiday cheer while supporting the community through canned food donations.

“With the support of strong partnerships and the kindness of our communities, the Santa Parade has evolved into a cherished and successful event, particularly for families facing challenges during the holiday season,” says Fire Chief Van Valkenburg.

Over the past five years, we’ve proudly partnered with city personnel to gather food for local food banks. **Last year, we collected a record-breaking 5,000+ pounds of food**, a significant increase from the 1,000+ pounds gathered in each of the previous years.

This year, we’re excited to expand our efforts by partnering with BSA Scout Troop 841, led by Scoutmaster Salee Norton. The troop will assist in refreshing Santa’s sleigh and will join us on the Federal Way routes to help collect canned food donations.



“Watching the participation grow every year is truly inspiring,” says Captain Brad Chaney. *“It’s amazing to turn a corner and see so many community members gathered together, eagerly awaiting the arrival of South King Fire and Santa.”*

Join Us for This Year’s Parade!

Save the Date

The Santa Parade will take place from 5:30 - 8:30 p.m. in:

- Des Moines on December 2 & 3.
- Federal Way on December 9, 10, 16 & 17.

How to Donate

Please have your non-expired canned goods or nonperishable food items packed in a bag to give to Santa’s helpers during the Santa Parade. Be sure to take a quick photo with Santa too!

Santa’s Routes

The Santa Parade routes will be posted in early November on our website at www.southkingfire.org. During the parade, you will be able to follow where Santa is on his route, online on our Santa Parade webpage, and Facebook page.



Scan the QR code to visit our Santa Parade webpage to see past videos, dates and times. Routes will be posted in November.



VOTERS SUPPORT A BETTER PLAN FOR THE FUTURE



We are deeply grateful to our communities for their overwhelming support in approving the Fire Benefit Charge (FBC).

The approval of the FBC allows South King Fire to move forward with a more sustainable plan for the future. The FBC replaces an outdated funding model that relied heavily on property taxes subject to fluctuations that created a "cycle of uncertainty." It offers a fairer and more stabilized funding approach, equipping us with the necessary resources to meet the growing demand for our services and better serve our communities.

Our commitment to you remains steadfast: to provide the critical services you depend on while responsibly managing taxpayer dollars.

South King Fire sincerely thanks our communities for their ongoing support!



What’s Next?

With the passage of the FBC in August 2024, the regular property tax levy for fire drops from \$1.50 per thousand dollars of assessed value to \$1.00. In November during the annual budget process, the Board of Commissioners will establish the FBC rate for the following year. After the approved budget is sent to King County, we are required to establish additional steps to implement the FBC.

Scan the QR code for more information.

SOUTH KING FIRE (SKF) Information:

SKF provides complimentary blood pressure checks, ride alongs, and fire station tours upon appointment.

STATION 62 - HEADQUARTERS
31617 1st Avenue South
Federal Way, WA 98003
253-839-6234
Business Hours: 8-4:30 M-F



Administration

Dave Van Valkenburg, Fire Chief
Kevin Crossen, Deputy Chief - Community Risk
Shane Smith, Deputy Chief - Operations
Lisa Defenbaugh, Deputy Chief - EMS/MIH

Joe Ganem, Executive Director
Mary Stevens, Human Resources
Sean Nichols, Fire Marshal

Board of Commissioners:

Greg Baruso, Chair
Caroline Vadino, Vice Chair

Bill Gates, Commissioner
Bill Fuller, Commissioner
Craig Burrus, Commissioner