

# At Your Service

Newsletter of Federal Way Fire Department  
Serving the Greater Federal Way Community  
Fall 2001

## "Fallen Heroes" Remembered

*A color guard of Federal Way firefighters prepares to lead a procession of fire, medic and police vehicles to the Fallen Heroes Memorial honoring those who lost their lives at the World Trade Center on September 11. The memorial was held at the SeaTac Mall during the Federal Way Fire Department's annual Safety show on October 6.*

## ***New Chief Leads Federal Way Fire Department***

Effective September 1, 2001, Chief of Operations Al Church became the Fire Department's new Fire Chief/Administrator.

Chief Church is a 23-year veteran, joining the Federal Way staff in 1978 and working his way up through the ranks. He was promoted to Chief of Operations in 1994 and became the department leader after former Administrator Jim Hamilton left to become the CEO of the Seattle/King County Chapter of the American Red Cross.

Chief Church completed the four-year Executive Fire Officer program at the National Fire Academy in 2000. He also has a B.S. in Workforce Education and Human Resource Development from Southern Illinois University and A.A. degrees in both Arts and Science and Fire Science. Planning for the future has been one of Chief Church's special strengths. He chaired the committee that developed the department's first Long Range Plan in 1990 and 1991, and has been instrumental in each update of the plan since then.



*Fire Chief/Administrator  
Al Church*

"I am very pleased to be leading an incredible group of dedicated firefighters, officers, volunteers and civilian personnel within the Federal Way Fire Department," said Chief Church. "My goal is to provide the department and community with a strong sense of involvement and dedication, both within the department as well as within the community. We have a number of challenges and opportunities ahead of us related to: the long term financial stability of the department, potential changes in our emergency medical services with the goal to provide additional services to the community, preparation and training for terrorism and other disasters, as well as continuing to provide the citizens in our community with the highest level of emergency services possible. I believe that the Federal Way Fire Department will be a strong leader in all areas, and I look forward to being a part of our department for a long time to come."

## A Note to the Community

*On behalf of the Federal Way Fire Department, let me thank every citizen who voted in the recent Primary on September 18<sup>th</sup>. During these turbulent and frightening times, the right to vote and express our opinions on a variety of issues is a right we Americans hold near and dear. Thanks go out to each of you for expressing your right and voting.*

*In addition, let me personally thank you for the continued support you have shown the Federal Way Fire Department. I am pleased to state that Proposition One was supported by a majority of the voters participating in the Primary, which will allow us to continue our mission without the possibility of a reduction in services during 2002. We will continue to be fiscally responsible with every tax dollar we receive, and to ensure that every citizen receives the highest level of emergency services possible.*

*Our country is still reeling from the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. We are now facing another stage of terrorism, that being fear and potential panic related to anthrax contamination. Let me assure all our citizens that the fire department is working with the City, County and State regarding anthrax scares and/or potential emergency responses. The worst thing that anyone can do is to panic and allow fear to overtake rationale thought. We all need to maintain our composure during these stressful times, and to put our faith in the emergency services who are trained to deal with these types of emergencies. Together, we will get through this.*

Chief Al Church

## **Federal Way Firefighter Recounts Experience in New York**

*by Firefighter Pat Soper*

**[Note: Nine Federal Way firefighters are members of the Puget Sound Urban Search and Rescue Team. Two of them, Pat Soper and Tony Sirgedas, were mobilized to assist in rescue operations after the September 11th World Trade Center disaster in New York.]**

As you know, on the morning of September 11, the unspeakable happened. The World Trade Center towers were attacked by terrorists from afar. I was in Wenatchee taking a leadership seminar when I saw the news on all the TV stations. I knew right away that I would be up for deployment with the FEMA Urban Search and



*Pat Soper*



*Tony Sirgedas*

Rescue (US&R) Team to a disaster of this magnitude. About one hour later I received a page that I knew was coming. "Come home and prepare for mobilization."

The team had been preparing for a practice deployment to Alaska for the following weekend. The WTC disaster quickly brought the practice exercise to a halt. I guess a real disaster takes precedence.

That was the longest three-hour drive I ever had. I called my wife and she knew what had to be done. She quickly gathered my pre-packed deployment bags, did some last minute details, and gathered my family to meet me at McChord Air Force Base. There they sent me off to meet the rest of the US&R team, including my fellow Federal Way firefighter, Tony Sirgedas.

We had to be escorted onto the air base because they were on lockdown and high alert. Once inside, we made our way to the passenger terminal where the mobilization process began. After 28 hours of being with the other 60 US&R members, Tony and I were told to stand down and sent home. I was temporarily relieved. This would not be a pleasant endeavor.

Within three days we had been given our new orders. On September 19th, we would fly as a team to New York City to help with the search and rescue efforts. I now had time to physically and mentally prepare myself for this mission.

At 3:30 a.m. on September 19th, Tony and I met the other members of the 62-member team at a fire station in Pierce County to be put on a bus and escorted onto McChord Air Force Base for deployment at 8:30. This team would now be my family for the next ten days. We were nervous and didn't know what New York City had in store for us.

After over 12 hours in the air and bus, we finally arrived at our base of operations (BoO). We made camp and set up our area to store ourselves and over 35 tons of specialized tools and equipment. Our BoO would be inside the Javitz Convention Center three miles from the World Trade Center. We shared this center with eight other FEMA teams from around the nation. Just like our team, they were made up of professional firefighters, police officers, and their own medical teams. The teams slept on army-issued cots lined up with hundreds of others. Each team split in half and took either the day or night shift to work on "The Pile." Tony and I were both on the night shift.

During the first 72 hours, I slept only 6 hours. We quickly started working "The Pile" with New York firefighters, trying to find the living and the dead. Rescue would be the best scenario, of course, but it quickly became evident the rescue was really a recovery effort as the disaster had occurred eight days prior. The deep voids (natural spaces in the debris) had only recently been exposed. It became our job to win over the confidence of the New York guys in order to be allowed to work their pile beside them. Within two days, the FDNY saw that our abilities and skills were beyond their expectations. What a compliment to have the FDNY guys ask specifically for "the Washington team" for the primary recovery jobs on the pile.

Over the next five days, our team performed various activities including searching voids, removing rubble from the pile bucket by bucket, cutting rebar and steel, and assisting FDNY wherever and whenever they asked us. Our work helped the FDNY firefighters to back off a little and gather themselves. They experienced hell this last week, losing a lot of friends, comrades, apparatus, and even their Chaplain. They all had heart-wrenching stories of that horrible moment in time where 343 firefighters and 49 fire engines and trucks vanished, all hidden in "The Pile." I'll leave the gore out, but the sadness spread throughout the entire area every time New York brought out one of their own, and it happened often while we were there.

“The Pile” cannot be described in words. Pictures cannot capture the damage that two 1100-foot towers coming down can cause. Fourteen acres of rubble 120 feet high in places—and 50 foot dips from the six stories caving down into the subway below—contained over 5000 graves. “The Pile” consisted of heavy twisted metal, paper everywhere, and the concrete turned to dust (very few whole concrete pieces left). The buildings had over 14 acres of glass skin, yet I never saw a single piece of glass on the ground. Like everything else, it had all been pulverized by the 1000 foot collapse.

The 14-hour shifts had taken their toll on the team. Ten days later it was time to go home. On September 29th, and after 13 hours in the air, we arrived at Boeing field to be greeted by our families and friends. Home is good!

The coming together of New York City made the best memories for our team. I couldn't believe how they came together to help each other in any way they could. The movie stars came out in droves to serve food in the soup kitchens and hug the rescue workers (I received more than a couple of famous kisses on the cheek). If anything good can come from this horrible disaster, it would be a solidified unity in this country, experienced tenfold in New York City.

Now that my sleep habits have normalized, I can with a clear head say the experience was both horrifying and gratifying. I am proud to have represented my community, my family, and my fire department. I hope never to experience this again. If something like this does happen, however, I would not hesitate to step forward again.

## **Even Most Electrical Fires Can be Prevented**

When you got out of bed this morning and turned on the light, did you think about the wires carrying the electricity that allowed you to do that?

Few people do. But you need to pay attention to your electrical system. During a typical year, there are almost 50,000 electrical fires in the U.S.

People often think there's nothing they can do about electrical fires except hope they're prepared if one happens. Like other types of fires, however, electrical fires can usually be prevented.

### **Install Systems Correctly**

Was all the electrical work in your home done by licensed electricians, under permits and inspection by local officials? Homeowners often bypass that route because it takes more time and money, but studies of electrical fires show many are due to improper installation by do-it-yourselfers. If the work wasn't done by licensed workers, or no permit and inspection were involved, have it inspected by a licensed electrician.

## Maintain Electrical Systems

Electrical systems age and wear out, the same as other parts of a home. Home wiring needs to be maintained, upgraded when necessary, and periodically inspected by a qualified, licensed electrician. If your house is more than 10 years old, the Consumer Products Safety Commission recommends an electrical inspection, especially if you have added high-wattage appliances or have renovated your wiring.

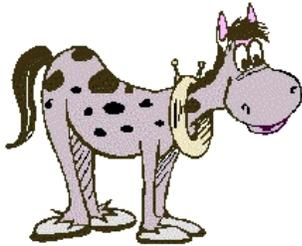
*There's a lengthy list of warning signs that you may have electrical problems. For more information, call 253-946-7246 and ask to have "Preventing Electrical Fires" sent to you.*

## Use Electrical Devices Safely

The next time you hear about an electrical fire, don't automatically blame the wiring or the appliance. Many times, it's the person using it ...or misusing it...that's to blame. For example, most light fixtures and lamps are labeled to show the brightest bulb that can safely be used. A seemingly small thing like using too high a wattage bulb can cause the fixture to overheat, or damage the insulation on the fixture's wiring.

Do you use electrical equipment safely? Ask for "Preventing Electrical Fires" and check your safety knowledge.

## The Old Nag



*(Stuff we've told you before. . .but a lot of you haven't done anything about it yet.)*

*Are your outdoor holiday lights still up at your house?* Outdoor holiday lights aren't meant to be left out all year in the weather. They can be damaged, increasing the fire danger, so take them down. Before you use them again, examine them carefully.

## Tips for Safer Winter Driving

### Do four-wheel drive vehicles need to use chains on snow or ice?

The answer is a definite YES! Four-wheel drive and all-wheel drive vehicles need to use winter traction devices to maintain control. These vehicles have a greater ability to start and go than vehicles with a conventional drive system, but they don't have a greater ability to **stop** in winter driving conditions. Four-wheel-drive vehicles also have no advantage when it comes to steering. They don't turn more quickly or hold the road any better than two-wheel-drive vehicles.

### Do you know how to use anti-lock brakes?

"Stomp and steer" is the secret to using an anti-lock braking system (ABS), which allows drivers to steer and maneuver their vehicles during hard braking. Many people don't use their anti-lock brakes correctly—they have the habit of pumping their brakes, to prevent wheel lockup. But an ABS system pumps the brakes **automatically** when wheel lockup is detected. Manually pumping anti-lock brakes, or letting up on them, decreases their effectiveness because it turns the system off and on. To use anti-lock brakes, don't pump them—just hold the brake pedal down with firm and continuous pressure and let anti-lock work for you.

## Be careful—fog can fool you!



Many multi-car crashes occur during bad weather, especially in fog. Vehicles often are going faster than the speed limit or faster than would be expected for the conditions. A British study found a physiological reason for this. The part of the brain that allows you to judge speed has neurons that fire at different rates. When there is plenty of light, the neurons fire rapidly and most people can judge speed pretty well. Under certain types of diffuse light situations, such as fog, the neurons fire more slowly. This fools the brain into thinking you are going more slowly than you really are. In a

computer simulation, people thought they were going about 60 mph and were actually going over 90 mph.

The “moral of the story”? When you’re driving in poor conditions, such as fog, check your speedometer! Your own judgment of how fast you are going may be wrong.

# The Senior Scene

## **OXYGEN:**

### **A lifesaver, but a danger, too.**

Many people with breathing problems now use home oxygen systems. Unfortunately, some people don’t realize the fire danger oxygen creates.

Contrary to what you may have heard, oxygen isn’t flammable or explosive. But it is an accelerator. That means that if a fire starts in the presence of oxygen, the fire will be larger and will spread faster.

Home oxygen therapy increases the amount of oxygen in the environment. Oxygen can saturate hair, beards, clothing, the fabric of furniture and anything else in the area. That’s why anyone using oxygen is told to stay away from flames or sparks and enforce a strict “no smoking” policy in their home. Do not smoke, and do not allow anyone else to do so. At restaurants, ask to be seated in the non-smoking section.

If you aren’t able to stop smoking, you must at least remove your cannula (the tube and nasal prongs), turn off the oxygen flow and leave the area of the oxygen. Never smoke or light a match or lighter while using oxygen. People have severely burned their face and body by lighting a cigarette while wearing their oxygen cannula. Remember, however, that even if the oxygen is not turned on, your hair or clothing may be saturated with it. It’s still not a good idea to smoke, even with the oxygen turned off.

Here are some other important safety precautions for using oxygen:

- Keep at least 10 feet away from flames and heat sources such as lighted gas stoves, lighted fireplaces, candles, or barbecue grills.
- Avoid using electrical appliances that might produce sparks, such as razors and hairdryers, while using your oxygen.
- If your health or life depends on oxygen and you use an oxygen concentrating machine, consider buying a generator so you will be able to power the concentrator in a major power failure. (You must keep the generator outside the home while using it, however, to avoid sparks and to keep carbon monoxide from building up.)

## What is the “Urban Search and Rescue Team”?

*by Captain Tom Thorson*

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was criticized in the late 1980s about its response to the needs of the country after several devastating hurricanes in the Southeast. In 1991, FEMA asked organizations to apply to become one of a select group of Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Task Forces. More than 200 US&R applications were received. These Task Forces would be able to respond quickly to earthquakes, hurricanes, building collapses or other disasters that overwhelm the local and state resources. Trained rescuers would bring their own specialized and technical equipment to assist any community that needs outside help.

The Puget Sound area didn't have any one organization large enough to field a team of about 186 rescuers with specific skills and provide enough technical rescue equipment to support a team for 7 to 10 days. The initial list of equipment required was large enough to weigh about 25 tons and fill a military aircraft.

The fire departments in the area got together and decided that we could form a *regional* team that would meet the requirements that FEMA was asking for. The Puget Sound group was awarded approval and became Washington Task Force #1 (WA-TF1) or the Puget Sound US&R Task Force. We were one of 25 Task Forces that were initially formed by FEMA; now there are 28. We are made up of firefighters from fire departments in King and Pierce County, as well as the Seattle Fire Department. We also have members from the Pierce County Sheriff's Office, Northwest Disaster Search Dogs group, structural engineers from the civilian sector, and several doctors from local hospitals.



*Captain Tom Thorson  
USAR Team Co-Leader*

The Task Force deploys with 62 members to any part of the country that has been declared a federal disaster by the President. A couple of the Task Forces are certified by the State Department to be an out-of-country resource as well. The team may also be used as a local or state rescue team within the state of Washington. The Task Force has members specially trained in the following skills: Incident Commanders, Safety, Planning, Technical Information, Rescue Squads, Search Squads, Hazardous Material Specialists, Canines and Handlers, Doctors, Paramedics, Logisticians, Heavy Equipment Operators, Communication Specialists and Structural Engineers. We can split into two groups and operate round-the-clock by working rotating 12-hour shifts.

Our equipment has now grown to over 35 tons of equipment that we take with us to support the Task Force no matter what area of the country we are sent to. We are totally self-sufficient to take care of all of our needs for 7 to 10 days. We have shelters and cooking equipment for housing and feeding the team. We do not depend on the disaster-hit community to have to assist us while we are trying to help them.

We are ready to be deployed within six hours from the time we get an activation order from FEMA. This is amazing, considering that we need to notify the members, have them relieved from their jobs, gather their personal equipment, gather the team's equipment and transport it all to the point of departure, which is usually McChord Air Force Base.

Some of the missions that the Puget Sound Task Force has been involved with are Typhoon Bryan in Guam in 1992, the Northridge earthquake in 1994, the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, to stand by at the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996, to assist with finding victims of a airplane crash in Guam and most recently to the World Trade Center attack in September, 2001.

The reason that we can assist other areas of the country with our Task Force is that the Federal Government funds these teams and members when they are deployed to a disaster. Team members have volunteered for their positions on the Task Force. Their departments support them by sending them to training that also is applicable to any disaster that might happen locally. When the team is deployed, the Federal Way Fire Department is not left short-staffed, because the rescue personnel are replaced by other department members on overtime that is paid for by FEMA.

The Federal Way Fire Department has nine members on the Puget Sound Task Force: Captain Tom Thorson (Task Force Co-Leader); Lt. Steve Hopf (Communications Specialist); Lt. Gordon Olson (Technical Search Specialist); Lt. Dave Michaels (Rescue Squad Specialist); Firefighter Tony Sirgedas (Search Team Manager); Firefighters Scott Mahlen, Sven Schievink, and Pat Soper (Rescue Squad Specialists); and Firefighter Roy Smith (Logistics Specialist).

The US&R team members also serve on the Federal Way Fire Department's local Technical Rescue Team, along with six other firefighters: Lt. Alex Charoni and Firefighters Craig Burrus, Ed Rickert, Jeff Hamel, Kevin Juma, and Joel Barrett. These members are trained by the FEMA team members as they come back from training and deployments, to enhance local skills and preparedness.

## ***Take Steps to Prevent***

# ***Carbon Monoxide Poisoning***

As the weather turns colder, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) urges you to have a professional inspection of all appliances that burn gas, kerosene, oil, coal or wood, to detect deadly carbon monoxide (CO) leaks. This includes furnaces, stoves, fireplaces, clothes dryers, water heaters and space heaters that use these fuels. Under certain conditions, they can produce carbon monoxide.

CO is a colorless, odorless gas and exposure to high levels of CO can kill you. An annual inspection and service of appliances is the first line of defense against this silent killer. The second defense is to buy and install a carbon monoxide detector.

CPSC recommends that the yearly professional inspection include checking chimneys, flues and vents for leaks and blockage by creosote or debris. Also have vents to furnaces, water heaters, and boilers checked to make sure they aren't loose or disconnected. Vent pipes on heating systems should also be checked to make sure they weren't included in a 1998 recall of high temperature plastic vent pipe.

Another source of carbon monoxide in your home could be vehicles left running while they are in an attached garage. The exhaust from cars and trucks contains CO that can seep into your home. Also, do not sit inside a running vehicle in a closed garage for long periods.

For more information, check the CPSC web site at <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerel/prhtml02/02004.html>. CPSC also maintains a free Hotline, 1-800-638-2772, that can be used to find out whether a product has been recalled.

## **Readers ask . . .**

***I see firefighters out inspecting businesses in their fire engine. Wouldn't it save money to have them do that in smaller vehicles?***

It would save wear on the trucks and the cost of the diesel fuel they use. However, those savings would be offset by some big disadvantages. Firefighters have to be ready for emergency calls even while they are inspecting, training or doing other tasks. If they need the fire engine for a fire, they need it NOW. They don't have time to go back to the fire station and swap vehicles. The minutes it would take to do that could mean someone's home is destroyed while they're waiting for firefighters to arrive.

The need for quick response is also the reason we don't split crews and send just one firefighter out to do the inspections in a smaller vehicle. Fires and EMS calls regularly require all three firefighters on an engine. (And some engines carry only two firefighters to start with.) Having one firefighter come from somewhere else—in a vehicle that doesn't have the lights, sirens and visibility that a fire engine does—means help to you could be delayed.

Some citizens have wondered why we don't have someone other than firefighters do those inspections. The reason is that business surveys aren't done just to make sure the business is firesafe. That's the biggest reason, and these safety checks have paid off in very low commercial

fire rates. But the visits are also an important part of firefighters' pre-fire planning. Their periodic surveys of the business keep firefighters familiar with the building, in case they have to respond to emergencies there.

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***Are you concerned about possible terrorism in this area? Check the web site of the American Red Cross for "Terrorism—Preparing for the Unexpected" (<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/keepsafe/unexpected.html>). For more information on public health and bioterrorism, visit <http://www.metrokc.gov/health/bioterrorism>. If you don't have access to the internet, call 253-946-7246 and ask to have the information mailed to you.***

Do you have suggestions or questions? Please mail them to Federal Way Fire Department, 31617 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South, Federal Way, WA 98003, or fax them to 253-529-7206. If you prefer, you can phone in your comments (253-839-6234) or e-mail us at [info@federalwayfire.org](mailto:info@federalwayfire.org)