



## Snohomish County Fire District #4

1525 Avenue D, Snohomish 98290

[www.snohomishfire.org](http://www.snohomishfire.org) | 360-568-2143

[f](#) @snohomishfiredistrict4 [t](#) @SnohomishFD4

[i](#) scfd\_43 [v](#) @snohomishcountyfiredistrict2009

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Chief Don Waller | Office (360) 568-2141 | [DonW@snohomishfire.org](mailto:DonW@snohomishfire.org)

#### **Snohomish County Fire District 4 facing challenges to service**

*Staffing cannot keep up with higher call volumes and overlapping calls*

Snohomish, Wash. – Call volumes for Snohomish County Fire District 4 have increased 34 percent in the last 10 years. The fire district responds to an average of 4,500 calls per year, of which 60 percent are for emergency medical service (EMS). In addition, overlapping calls – more than two emergency calls that come in at the same time – happen 28 percent of the time.

Revenue is not keeping up with the demand for and costs to provide services.

“Thanks to the support of our community, our firefighters are highly trained to provide quality emergency services,” Fire Chief Don Waller said. “We continue to be transparent with our community – and we require additional staffing to keep up with higher call volumes and overlapping calls.”

Snohomish County Fire District 4 relies on full-time and part-time personnel to provide fire suppression and prevention, EMS, water rescue, hazardous material spills, motor vehicle accidents and life safety programs.

#### **Revenue is not keeping up with demand and the cost to provide service**

Daily operations of the fire district are funded by a fire levy capped at \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Voters last approved a fire levy rate of \$1.50 in 2017. Since that time, the rate has dropped to \$1.15 while call volumes have increased by 19 percent due to growth and an aging population. Overlapping calls also are increasing, which can lead to longer response times.

More calls lead to higher costs. For example, the fire district is paying more for overtime for firefighters and fuel and maintenance costs are up because of inflation. In addition, the fire district’s stations were designed in the 1980s for a volunteer department. The outdated stations delay response times and impact firefighter health and safety.

#### **Why do levy rates drop?**

Each year, the fire district is allowed to collect a set amount of revenue. State law limits the fire district to that amount plus one percent more per year. Even if property values double, the fire district can only

collect one percent more. This means that the levy rate falls as property values rise to limit the fire district to the same amount per year plus that one percent increase.

This is called “levy compression” and impacts a fire district’s ability to provide emergency services.

“Our challenges are two-fold,” Chief Waller said. “We require more firefighters to put both a fire engine and medic unit in service at the same time to meet the need for emergency services in our community. We also want to update our facilities. Stations need to be brought up to modern industry standards to allow for faster response times and improve firefighter health and safety.”

The Board of Fire Commissioners is currently discussing funding options, and a final decision will be made after a public process is conducted. All board meetings are open to the public and meeting information can be found on the fire district’s website [www.snohomishfire.org](http://www.snohomishfire.org).

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*Snohomish County Fire District 4 provides fire and life safety services to 32,000 people over 62 square miles. The fire district relies on full-time and part-time emergency personnel and volunteer chaplains who respond to an average of 4,500 calls per year, of which 60 percent are for Emergency Medical Service (EMS). The fire district’s firefighters are highly trained to provide quality emergency services including fire suppression and prevention, EMS, water rescue, hazardous material spills, auto extrication and life safety programs.*