



Benton County Fire Protection District No. 4

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www.bcf4.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fire Chief Fields Unusual Questions About Ballot Measure

WEST RICHLAND, WASH. — Benton County Fire District 4 is asking voters to consider a bond to build and equip a station (including another ambulance) and replace three fire engines that are approaching the end of their usable lives. The station would be in the western part of the fire district's service territory.

Surprisingly, Chief Bill Whealan says that questions he receives about the proposal aren't cost-related. (The bond would be approximately \$7 per month for the owner of a \$300,000 home.) In general, people want to know how an additional station will improve service district-wide.

"People recognize that population has increased and we need to maintain emergency service levels," said Chief Bill Whealan. "The questions we are receiving are completely different than past ballot measures."

Population has definitely increased for the fire district: The City of West Richland has grown almost 25 percent since 2010. Unincorporated areas served by Benton County Fire District 4 have grown by 30 percent. Looking at call volumes, the fire district is responding to 62.5 percent more emergencies in the same time period.

The purpose of the bond is to build and equip another station (including an ambulance), as well as replace three aging fire engines. This investment will improve response times and provide additional capacity for back-to-back emergencies.

The key for any fire department is to have enough staff and apparatus to cover anticipated call volumes from anywhere in the district. This becomes a challenge when a fire district, like Benton County Fire District 4, experiences such a surge in call volumes. Currently, it can take almost 17 minutes to respond to an emergency that happens in the western part of the fire district.

"That's unacceptable," said Chief Whealan. "Another station in the area will reduce response times and provide backup units for the rest of the district."

Here's how it works: The fire district has two stations currently – one at Harrington Road and Grosscup Boulevard, another at Bombing Range Road and Mount Adams View Drive. Both stations are located in the West Richland city limits and on the edge of unincorporated Benton County. If a unit from one station is on a call, there is another unit from the other ready to respond. But what happens when you have three calls back-to-back, which is an increasing occurrence. In those cases, it takes longer for responding units to get there because they may be wrapping up a call or coming from a longer distance.

The new station is proposed for the area of State Route 224 near the Van Giesen Street and Keene Road intersection. With three stations, the fire district will have multiple units ready to respond in strategic locations, which reduces response times.

"We want to provide the highest level of service possible," said Chief Whealan. "Historically, voters have approved funding for a fire station every 20 years. We're at that benchmark now."

More information about the bond can be found at www.bcf4.org. Chief Bill Whelan also is available to answer questions at (509) 967-2496 or wwhealan@bcfd4.org.

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Benton County Fire District 4 is proud to provide fire and emergency medical service (EMS) to 18,232 people over 52 square miles, including the City of West Richland. The fire district operates under a balanced budget and maintains adequate reserve funds in case of an emergency. It also has a history of successfully passing financial and accountability audits by the state. Learn more about Fire District 4 at www.bcf4.org, "Like" us on Facebook at /BCFD4 or follow us on Twitter @BCFD4Info.