

For a point of clarification, the fire district is the legal entity created through the election process. It is also the actual physical boundary for the agency. It may also be considered as the people who live and travel within that boundary.

The fire department is the actual process of operations. It is the building, the personnel, the vehicles and the method in which things are done.

It can be viewed as – “the fire district was created in 1971 and from there, they built the fire department.”

Most people prefer to call it “the fire department”, but for most practical matters, the terms are usually interchangeable.

Fire Department History

The Desert Hills Fire District was created through an election in 1971 when a majority of voters elected to create a taxpayer supported fire district. The original fire district included the communities of Desert Hills and Crystal Beach but was later expanded to include the communities of Havasu Heights and the areas of Interstate 40. Over the years, numerous annexations by the City of Lake Havasu have reduced the size of the fire district and its budget or potential for revenue.

The first elected Fire Chief was Larry VanBynen. He was followed by Alvin Chapman, Leonard Wells, Bob Bouldin, Mathew Espinoza, Bill Weber and Pat Dennen (interim fire chief).

In 2012, the state legislature enacted a law that forced all fire districts governed by an elected fire chief and secretary-treasurer to become governed by a fire-board. On December 1st, 2012, Denny Burns, Howard Coulson and John Hayes were installed as the first fire board members of the fire district.

The original fire station was located in a Quonset hut at 3979 London Bridge Road. In the early 80's, a building at Davis Camp was disassembled and transported in three parts to the address at 3983 London Bridge Road. Using a tremendous amount of donated labor and materials, the donated building was then reassembled, with additional building parts added, and dedicated as the new fire station in the spring of 1986.

Regulations

Arizona fire districts are governed by Arizona Revised Statute Title 48. Title 48 Chapter 5 outlines the basic rules for fire districts and how they are managed. Fire districts are also governed by a variety of other statutes which pertain to all government agencies, such as public financing laws, open meeting laws, procurement laws, etc.

Arizona Revised Statutes are constantly being reviewed and modified by the state legislature. Taxing abilities, cost recovery measures, ambulance billing, and other funding sources are often legislatively challenged.

Medical operations are governed by rules set forth by the Arizona Department of Health Services as allowed by Arizona Revised Statute Title 36, which addresses public health and safety. Rules for certification and scope of practice for EMTs and Paramedics are spelled out within this code. These rules are also under constant review for change.

Title 36 also requires that medical operations be directly managed by a medical director, which allows local oversight of EMS operations. The medical director appoints a pre-hospital coordinator to work under their authority to ensure that rules and guidelines are established, and followed.

EMS personnel are offered monthly training to ensure proficiency in their skills, review policy, review significant EMS events, and ensure quality. These meetings are usually held twice in one week, once a month, at the Kiowa fire station. The medical director, through policy, mandates a specific attendance standard in order to ensure good standing. Those that do not meet the specific standard are offered remediation measures to bring

them back in good standing. If an EMS provider (EMT or Paramedic) cannot maintain good standing, their ability to work in the field is revoked.

Associations

The fire district is a member of the Arizona Fire District Association, which is an organization that helps fire districts stay within the laws by providing guidance and resources of information through a series of networks. The association hosts a winter conference in Laughlin Nevada in January of each year to afford a variety of educational opportunities for fire district employees and boards. The association also hosts a summer conference in Tucson in July of each year.

The Association also lobbies the legislature on the behalf of fire districts to ensure that fire district's interests are adequately protected. Tax relief organizations, cities and towns, developers, and other special interest groups are constantly sponsoring legislative bills that pose serious threats on the abilities of fire districts to operate and provide service.

The fire district is also a member of the Mohave County Fire Officers Association. The association is comprised of all the other fire districts and city departments within the county and other members who have an inherent interest in public safety. Other members include the Arizona State Fire Marshal's Office, Mohave County Emergency Management Office, Mohave County Sheriff's Office, Arizona State Forestry Division, Volunteer Fireman's Insurance Service, and other interested entities. The association meets once monthly at various locations throughout the county. Members take turns hosting the meeting. Dinner for the group is provided by the hosting agency.

The Fire Officers Association allows all of the fire departments and other interested agencies in the county to discuss relevant events such as arson fires, training opportunities, legislative changes, equipment orders, personnel changes and more. It is the perfect medium in which to gather or distribute information to other similar agencies in the local area.

The fire district is also closely associated with the Desert Hills Fire District Community Association (which uses the same boundaries as the fire districts as a model – hence the “Fire District” in the title). It provides a gathering spot for meetings, assists with neighborhood cleanups, and provides articles for the Roadrunner.

As a centralized location in the community, the fire station in Desert Hills also serves as a meeting location for several homeowners association. The associations include Sunlake Village, Canterbury, Tract 1082, North Pointe and Sailing Hawks. In appreciation, these associations routinely make contributions to the fire department.

Funding

The majority of funding for the fire department comes through property tax assessments. The fire district, through its elected board, may levy a tax of up to \$3.25/hundred dollars of assessed value on a property owner. Different types of properties are assessed differently throughout the fire district. For instance, vacant land is assessed at 16%, residential property is assessed at 10% and commercial property is assessed at 20% of its value.

An example of how taxes are applied:

A home and land valued at \$100,000 is assessed at 10% of its value (\$10,000). The fire district can tax that \$10,000 at \$3.25 per hundred dollars (3.25%) and have revenue of \$325.

If the total assessed value of all properties in the fire district is valued at \$40,000,000 and the fire district levies a rate of \$3.25 per hundred dollars, the income for the fire district is \$1,300,000.

With a fluctuating economy having a direct bearing on fluctuating property values, it is likely that the tax levy rate may to be adjusted to meet the districts needs or district resources be adjusted to reflect the income provided.

Total taxpayer income is only valid if taxpayers pay their taxes though. A taxpayer may be delinquent for several years before the county places a tax lien on their property. This lien can then be held for a longer period before it is sold at a tax lien sale. Fire districts may not see full funding as expected through the budgeting process if taxpayers do not pay their taxes. It is common for the fire district to always have some outstanding taxes due.

The fire department has measures in place to send bills for services provided to those who use services who are not Desert Hills Fire District residents and are not at a residential property (RV parks are considered residential property), or are injured while committing a criminal act (arson, DUI, etc).

The fire department also has a Cooperative Rate Agreement with the State Forestry Division to provide apparatus and personnel at wildland fires as requested. The state will pay predetermined hourly rates for apparatus and for staffing. Staffing pay also includes workers compensation and retirement funding. The agreement also requires the state to pay for damage to vehicles during assignments. Depending on the activity of the fire season and the participation of the fire department, revenues can be significant.

The fire department is always seeking out grants to offset the cost of operations or equipment. State and federal grants are occasionally received. The State Health Department occasionally awards grants for medical equipment, the Governor's Office of Highway Safety occasionally awards grants for rescue equipment, the State Forester's Office occasionally awards grants for firefighting equipment and the federal government occasionally awards grants for staffing. The fire department will soon be receiving funding for nine firefighters to work from January 2013 until December 2015.

The fire department also works with the Auxiliary to raise funds through a variety of fund raising efforts. Most notable are the monthly pancake breakfasts and the twice-yearly spaghetti dinners. It is usual for the fire department to receive up to \$10,000 per year from these efforts. Over the years, the fire department has received funding for a large amount of equipment including jaws-of-life, thermal imaging equipment, firefighting air packs, air compressors, turnout gear, and more.

The events hosted by the Auxiliary also allow the local community to interact with the firefighters in the fire station as well as allow the public a place to interact with each other. This interaction builds stronger bonds between the local community and the fire department. This bond is crucial to keeping a good faith with the public, who are not only our customers, but also our bosses. The Auxiliary is an integral part of the fire department and works well to ensure that the fire department is always cast in a good light.

The fire department also accepts donations from the general public. Monetary donations are deposited in a dedicated account. Occasional donations of goods such as tools, equipment, gear or other items are accepted whenever practical.

Most of the revenues generated by the fire district are dedicated to personnel. The Treasurer reports that upwards of 90 percent of the revenues are dedicated to keeping boots on the ground. Other costs such as fuel, station costs and vehicle maintenance required a significant portion of the remaining funding. In order to ensure the best service possible, the fire department carries almost no outstanding debt and uses a variety of measures to reduce costs.

Budgeting

The budgeting process begins in February each year when the County Assessor's office submits a report to the fire department estimating the assessed value within the fire district. This assessment provides the fire department with a basic idea of what the funding for the next fiscal year will allow. Provided that the tax levy rate is not adjusted, a drop in assessed value results in a drop in funding and an increase in assessed value results in an increase in funding (provided that all taxes are collected).

From February until June, the figures provided by the county are revised as property owners appeal their values and values are adjusted accordingly. The fire department uses the most recent assessment values available to adjust the proposed budget.

With the figures provided by the county, the Fire Chief prepares a proposed budget. The proposed budget is presented at an open, public meeting in April. Each line item of the budget is discussed.

The fire department is required to publish the proposed budget in the local newspaper for a period of at least three consecutive days prior to the adoption of the budget. Usually, this publication takes place immediately after the first public presentation of the budget. This proposed budget is also required to be posted in three public places (fire station, Sheriff's Office, and post office) during the budgeting process.

As the Assessor makes adjustments to the values (usually in the downward direction), the Fire Chief will adjust the proposed budget accordingly to reflect changes.

The final adoption of the budget takes place at an open public meeting in June. (Note: Assessed values are not considered final until sometime around September, despite the requirement that fire district budgets must be submitted before they are finalized. So, the assessed values used by the fire district will continue to adjust after the final adoption of the budget. Usually, these final adjustments are small and have little significant impact on the final outcome of the budget).

Once adopted, the budget is delivered to the Mohave County Board of Supervisors, Mohave County Finance Department, Mohave County Assessor's Office, and Arizona State Library Archives.

The fiscal year runs from July 1st until June 30th of each year.

Assets

The fire district currently owns and operates two fire stations and a fleet of apparatus. The fire department also owns property located at the Arizona Gateway that is slated for a future fire station. All buildings and real estate are fully owned by the fire district.

The main fire station, located in Desert Hills, houses several fire engines, water tenders, rescue vehicle, and administrative staff. It also acts as the community hub of Desert Hills. Most community outreach projects are originated in the Desert Hills station. The Desert Hills station responds to emergencies in the greater Desert Hills and Crystal Beach areas as well as highway calls up to milepost 194. This station also provides mutual aid to the city on a regular basis.

The fire station located in Havasu Heights was originally built as a two-bay station in the early 1990's. It was supposed to be staffed by a group of volunteers from the community. However, over the years, most of the volunteers drifted away. In 2005, living quarters were added to allow full-time staffing to remain at the station. This station responds to emergencies in the Havasu Heights, Arizona Gateway Interstate 40 and Highway 95 area.

Both of these fire stations respond to emergencies together when necessary. Motor vehicle accidents, fires and other large-scale emergencies will see both stations deployed together.

The fire department's apparatus is mostly paid for. There is 1½ outstanding payment due on the newest fire engine that was acquired in 2006.

Each apparatus in the fleet is unique and has its own purpose. Below, you will find descriptions of each apparatus and its capabilities and uses:

- Unit 1401 is a 2015 Chevrolet Silverado 4WD that is equipped with basic life support equipment. It is used primarily by the Fire Chief as a response vehicle.
- Engine 212 is a 1991 International with a 2500 gallon water tank, 15 gallons of class A foam and 5 gallons of AFFF. It has a 1250 gpm pump, 100 ft of 1½ inch front jump line, 200 ft of 1½ inch pre-connects, 150 ft of 2½ inch rear discharge, and 1600 ft of 2½ inch supply line. It is used as a stand-alone first due fire engine and as a water source for other engines. It is stationed at the Havasu Heights station.
- W/T 2 is a 1991 GMC Topkick with an 1800 gallon water tank and 15 gallons of foam. It has a 600 gpm vehicle mounted pump and a 400 gpm portable pump, 2000 gallon portable drop tank, a 150 ft and a 200 ft 1½ inch pre-connect, and has a ¾ inch booster reel line. It is stationed at the Desert Hills station.

- Unit 1402 is a 2008 Chevrolet Colorado 4 door 4WD with BLS EMS equipment only. It is used to transport additional personnel to emergency scenes. It is housed at the Desert Hills station.
- Unit 1403 is a 2002 Ford F-250 extended cab, utility bed 4WD, with ALS/BLS response equipment. It is used to conduct fire inspections and respond to emergency scenes. It is stationed at the Desert Hills station.
- Attack 4 is a 2004 Ford F-450 extended cab, utility bed 4WD, with a 200 gallon water tank and a 10 gallon foam tank. It has a twin impeller 120 gpm pump with a 100 ft 1½ inch single jacket pre-connect and a 100 ft 1 inch booster reel. It is used for to attack wildland fires. It is stationed at the Desert Hills station.
- Rescue 5 is a 2005 Ford F-550 crew cab, utility bed 4WD with a 182 gallon water and 15 gallon foam tank. It has a 120 gpm CAF unit; 200 ft long 1½ inch pre-connects. It is used to respond to medical emergencies, fires and vehicle accidents. It is stationed at the Havasu Heights station.
- Engine 21 is a 2006 KME Custom Chassis with a 2000 gallon water tank and 150 gallons of foam. It has a 1250 gpm pump, a 100 ft 1½ inch front jump line, 200 ft long 1½ inch pre-connects, a 150 ft 2½ inch left rear discharge, and carries 1600 ft of 2½ inch supply line. It is used as a first due fire engine and medical response vehicle. It is stationed at the Desert Hills station.
- Engine 23 is a 1993 KME International fire engine with a 750 gallon water tank and a 15 gallon class A foam tank. It has a 1250 gpm pump, 3600 watt generator. It has a 100 ft 1½ inch front jump line, 200 ft long 1¾ inch pre-connects, 150 ft 2½ inch rear discharge, and 1400 ft 3½ inch supply line. It is used primarily as a medical, vehicle accident and fire response engine. It is stationed at the Desert Hills station.

Operations

The department has instituted the policy of service to the community whenever possible using a combination of fulltime and reserve firefighters. As public servants, we should serve the public.

Usually, there are three personnel on duty each at each fire station. These firefighters work 48-hour shifts, which are followed by 96 hours off duty (2 days on – 4 days off). This requires three shifts (A-B-C). This schedule requires three people per station x 2 stations x three shifts equaling 18 people.

During the daytime, there is additional administrative and command staff on duty. During the daytime on Saturday and Sunday, reserve firefighters take turns filling a ten-hour shift. This shift allows the reserve firefighter the opportunity to participate in normal daily activities such as training, vehicle and equipment inspections, building maintenance, fire inspections and emergency responses. This shift also allows the reserve firefighter the opportunity to interact with the career firefighters, which in turn, builds a bond. Reserve firefighters also backfill for career personnel when they are sick or on paid time off and minimum staffing standards are compromised.

With the addition of the recently acquired SAFER Grant, station staffing will be boosted to 4 persons per station for a period of two years. The economy and assessed values will determine how many of those firefighters will be retained upon the expiration of the grant.

Normal, day-to-day operations and emergencies can usually be handled by the on-duty crews. In the event of a significant emergency such as a fire, vehicle accident or multiple simultaneous emergencies, reserve firefighters and off-duty staff are summoned via pagers and text messages to staff the fire station or additional apparatus.

Structure fires and mass casualty accidents are usually the most manpower extensive assignments. Ensuring a safe-as-possible emergency scene and providing the best care possible requires that enough personnel be on scene as quickly as possible. This response is predicated on having as many personnel as possible at the ready. However, realizing fiscal limits have a significant impact on the total number of on-duty staff, the fire department works hard to strike a balance between what can be afforded vs. what can be needed at any given

instance. Therefore, reserves who live a short distance from the fire station and personnel who are willing to respond to the fire station when summoned while off-duty are important.

Training

Emergency personnel continuously train. Most training takes place in-house while on the clock. Some, more extensive training takes place on weekends. Firefighters are constantly training on vehicle operations, tools and equipment, target hazards, community orientation and EMS.

The Base Hospital Director provides monthly training for all EMS personnel within the greater Lake Havasu area. This training includes employees from Lake Havasu City Fire Department, River Medical Ambulance, and Omniflight Medical Helicopters. EMT's and Paramedics have attendance policies set forth by the Director in order to remain in good standing. This, once-monthly, training take place at the fire station located on Kiowa Blvd. In Lake Havasu. During this training session, which usually lasts about two hours, Both Desert Hills' fire stations are vacated. Crews remain subject to emergency calls during training sessions, but with a slightly extended response time due to being located on the north side of the city.

In addition to monthly EMS meetings, EMS personnel also conduct online training to sharpen their skills. This training exposes personnel to scenarios not normally encountered in the Desert Hills Fire District. The online training is a budgeted item that seeks renewal each year.

Emergency Calls

Medical emergencies constitute most calls for service. Yearly, about 80% of call volume is medical in nature. With the influx of winter visitors from October to April, a significant portion of medical calls take place during the cooler months.

The Desert Hills Fire District does not experience an abundance of structure fires, but remains ever vigilant should one occur. There are usually periods of several years between significant structure fires.

Vehicle accidents constitute the highest likelihood of a mass casualty accident. With traffic flows on Highway 95 and Interstate 40 always increasing, the chance of a passenger bus or tractor trailer accident involving multiple passenger cars is ever present.

In order to be ready for large-scale emergencies, the fire department is a participant with the mutual aid agreement as written by the Mohave County Fire Officers Association. The agreement allows every fire department in the county to provide mutual aid to other departments if such resources are available.

Most mutual aid requests come from Lake Havasu City Fire Department when they are dedicated to a structure fire or large-scale incident such as a flood. Usually, requests are made to provide a station relocation to be ready to handles a secondary call such as a medical emergency or fire within the city's boundary. Occasionally the fire department is dispatched to respond directly to the fire scene to assist the city fire department. The city reciprocates by providing resources to Desert Hills during times when our resources are committed to another emergency, such as a vehicle accident on the interstate, and backfill of the fire station in Desert Hills has not been completed.

Golden Shores and Yucca Fire Departments occasionally request mutual aid from Desert Hills.

Policies and Procedures

The fire department has a Policy and Procedures manual that is available to all employees. There is a printed copy at each station. The manual addresses the most basic functions of the fire department. The manual is frequently reviewed for necessary changes to ensure it remains up-to-date and valid. All employees are

responsible to read, understand and abide by the manual. When changes to the manual are effected, employees are notified. Each revision date of the manual is identified in the footer.

Accountability

According to state law, the fire district undergoes an annual audit that not only accounts for monies acquired and spent, but also reviews accounting practices and department policies in order to limit the potential for legal exposure. Each year, the team of auditors selects different policies to review to ensure the fire district does not take on unnecessary liability. Each year the fire district receives a report that is sent to the Mohave County Board of Supervisors, the state's Library of Archives, as well as each board member. The results from the 2011-2012 audits are expected soon.

Board Meetings

Arizona law requires public bodies to conduct their business in the open. Public meetings are required to be held at least once each month. The proposed meeting location and time are posted in three locations throughout the community (fire station, Sheriff's Office and post office). The minutes and agendas are also posted on the district website at www.deserthillsfire.org. The entire year's meeting schedule is posted along with any other incidental interactions where board members might encounter each other and not discuss fire district business (Community Association meetings, pancake breakfasts, etc.). An agenda for the meeting shall be posted at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

In accordance with the open meeting law, board members shall not meet or discuss fire district business outside of an open public meeting.

State law does allow for board members to meeting in Executive Session to discuss matters deemed to be "sensitive". Personnel matters, pending litigation or legal consultation and other matters determined by the board to be sensitive may be discussed in private, in a posted, agenda meeting that is closed to the public. While certain matters can be discussed in private, actions cannot be taken at this meeting and must take place in a regular open meeting. Minutes of the Executive Session shall be recorded but are not open to the public. While Executive Session is allowable by law, it does give an impression of secrecy to the general public. This impression can create a feeling of distrust between the board and the public. As a policy, Executive Sessions should not be used except when absolutely necessary to protect the fire district.