

2014 Annual Town Report



Westhampton Fire Department

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The Westhampton Fire Department had another busy year in 2014 providing emergency services to the community. The Department responded to one-hundred and seventy-three calls for service this year. These calls for service were for fire suppression, emergency medical services, hazardous materials response, motor vehicle accidents, utility wires down, residential fire alarm activations, inspections and many more.

The Department's fleet of apparatus consists of a 2004 Engine, a 1986 Engine, a 1990 garbage truck cab and chassis with a milk truck body converted into a Water Tanker, a 2002 Brush Truck, a 2009 Rescue Truck, and a 2009 Mobile Air trailer with a light tower and generator. All vehicles are checked by Department personnel on a weekly basis to ensure a state of operational readiness and reliability. In addition, the Town's Highway Department has been a tremendous asset to the Fire Department, completing all routine maintenance, fluid changes, and upkeep of the vehicles. The vehicle maintenance program, as established, helps to prolong the expected life-span of the vehicles and improve the safety during emergency responses. Again this year, we had both Engines professionally pump-tested to ensure adequate pump performance as determined by the manufactures. These testing procedures are also reflected in the Department's Insurance Services Organization (ISO) rating and meet the requirements set by National Standards pertaining to Fire Apparatus.



Department Retro-fitted Tanker Vehicle

The Department also had all of the fire hose pressure tested to ensure adequate operational effectiveness. National Standards recommend that this is done once a year, and in addition, it is reflected in the ISO ratings that this testing procedure be done to minimize the insurance rates in Town. More important, to ensure the safety of all members utilizing fire hose during operational procedures, it is our responsibility that they are provided with equipment that is safe and functioning to the highest standards. The testing revealed that the Department did have fire hose in service that did not pass the required pressure rating. These were removed from service and replaced with some of the spare hose that was also tested and passed the requirements. These testing requirements demonstrated that this was a project that was needed and should be continued each year to help ensure that the integrity and operational capacity of the equipment is maintained. We also had all of our ground ladders tested to the National Standards, ensuring they could meet the performance requirements during emergency operations. All of these projects are critical to properly maintaining all of the equipment and ensuring the highest degree of safety for our personnel utilizing these resources.

One of the greatest challenges faced by volunteer departments across the country is the recruitment and retention of Department members. Greater demands on training, increasing call volumes and the balance of a full time job and family all require a delicate balance that can minimize the number of people interested in becoming a member. The Town of Westhampton has been very fortunate over the years, given the difficulties seen by other departments, to maintain this type of department and the high level of performance and services provided by these individuals. The Department currently has thirty-five volunteer members and is always seeking new members to help serve the community. These volunteers are vital to keeping the overall cost for services down while at the same time performing a critical service needed in the community.

Members of the Department are continuing to work with the Elementary School and their staff to deliver public education and fire safety lessons to the Students. This education is done in the form of classroom presentations and demonstrations as well as public education programs at Town events such as the Fall Festival. Our Department continues to be a member of the Hampshire County Fire Defense Association providing us access to a regional public education trailer to assist in the delivery of the fire safety lessons. This continues to be an extremely valuable program and we look forward to our continued collaboration with the school Administration for this purpose.



The Department continues to rely heavily on its website to help with the communications throughout the community. We have transitioned all of our burning permits and inspections to this online forum to make it more convenient for anyone to request or schedule these and get immediate feedback. For a Department that is an all volunteer, we have already seen a dramatic improvement in communication both externally and internally with our members. We hope to continually make improvements such as this in the future to better service all the residents as efficiently as possible.

In addition, this year we worked with the Town Treasurer and Unibank to provide online payments and scheduling for people needing a home smoke and carbon monoxide detector inspection. This enables all funds to be directly sent on a secure wireless network to the Towns bank account and then generates an email notifying the Department about the need for an inspection. Our hope is to transition all inspectional fees and services to this online system in July 2015.

To access the Department website, please visit www.westhamptonfire.org and you can also visit us on our Facebook page under the Westhampton Fire Department page.

The Department continued providing services for installation of child safety restraint systems. Motor vehicle crashes continue to be a leading cause of injury and death for children under the age of 12. Based on information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), although motor vehicle deaths among children age 12 and under has decreased by 43% in the past decade, still more than 9,000 children age 12 and under have died in crashes in the past decade. The Department has one technician trained to properly install these seats to help continually reduce the number of children becoming injured. Knowing how to use car seats, booster seats, and seat belts along with wearing these no matter how short the trip, will lead to a safer environment for our children. To sign up for this service, simply click on our website and choose a date.

In October, our 2004 Engine got retrofitted with a Compressed Air Foam System that was approved by Town Meeting in May 2013. The purpose of this project was to improve our operational capabilities with the limited water supply here in Town by using this new technology to enhance the water we carry on our current fleet of vehicles. All members completed the training needed for this technology and has already seen the benefits of this with a structure fire at 135 Southampton Road in which we only needed one-hundred and forty seven gallons of water to suppress the fire compared to previous fires needing over one-three thousand gallons of water. The Department would like to, again, thank the Town for their support for this much needed project.

The Department was successful this year in obtaining an Assistance to Firefighters Grant in the amount of \$121,421 for the purchase of fifteen new air packs, spare bottles, face pieces, voice amplifiers, and an accountability system. This new equipment replaces air packs that were over fifteen years old and could no longer be serviced or repaired. At last year's Town Meeting, voters approved \$35,000 to begin to replace these units pending the award of this grant. We are proud that we will not need these funds or any future funds for this project and we have reliable, safe equipment for our personnel and community that will last for the next fifteen years with the help from this grant award.

Another grant the Department was awarded this past year was from the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency in the amount of \$5,500 to replace all of our pagers for our volunteers. These pagers are issued to each individual as a primary means of notification and alerting when there is an emergency. The current ones were over eight years old and were unreliable, outdated, and would be costly to repair. These funds enabled our Department to replace this outdated technology ensuring we have a reliable system in place for emergencies.

In July, the Town switched to a new mass notification system to alert all Town residents for any emergent needs. This system is called CodeRED and provides the Town the ability to call all landlines, or any other cell phone numbers, text message, or email individuals on the alert. The intent of this type of system is to improve communication prior to a large scale disaster, or weather related event to provide guidance and direction to the community on things such as expectations of power being restored, opening of warming shelters, and items that individuals are expected to have on their own. We have done two test calls with this system with positive feedback from the system and the community as a whole. Anyone can sign up for this system by going to the Department website at www.westhamptonfire.org and click on the CodeRED icon on our homepage.

On December 17, 2014, the Westhampton Fire Department had three new recruits graduate from the Massachusetts Call/Volunteer Recruit Training Program. This program is 320 hours in duration and cover all of the academic and practical requirements as outlined in the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1001 on Firefighter requirements. The three individuals were Alex Antosz, Matt Campbell, and Katie Sobon. All three excelled in this program and we are extremely proud of each of them and are fortunate to have them as members of the Department.

Other new members brought on this year were Samuel Labonte, Kayla Holt, and Barrett Zimmerman. We welcome these new members as they transition to our Department and begin their training for both fire and emergency medical services calls.

There are a number of capital projects that the Fire Department is going to need input and support on from the community in the immediate future. The largest of these is a need for a new Public Safety Complex to meet the growing demands of the community. The current facility is reaching sixty years old and no longer is able to accommodate the demands placed on the public safety services (Police, Fire, EMS, and Emergency Management). In addition, one of the Engines is twenty-eight years old and has reached its life expectancy. However, no new Engine available will fit in the current facility given the current size and parameters. The Tanker vehicle is also old and being utilized for operations that it was not designed.

All of these items have been forwarded to the Town Capital Improvements Committee with emphasis placed on a new building. We will continue to explore all available funding options to minimize the financial impact on the community, but the conversation needs to continue in order to plan and prepare for vehicles and equipment for the next ten to twenty-five years and a facility that will continue to meet the service demands for the next fifty plus years. We did meet with the Selectboard and spoke with them about applying for a federal grant to replace the Tanker vehicle. That grant was submitted in December and we should hear about this in July 2015.

Finally, I'd like to thank all of the personnel at the Department for their continued support and dedication to the Town and the Department. It continues to be an absolute pleasure and honor to work for all of them and be part of an organization that cares so much about their community. The members of the Westhampton Fire Department continue to do much more than respond to emergencies. Throughout the years, they continue to clean residents chimneys each fall, hang the flags on the utility poles in the center of town when needed, get involved in community sponsored events such as the Halloween parade, fill residents swimming pools and the water tanks at the Town Cemetery, install smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors, and put up house numbers for residences to help emergency responders find the proper location and decrease response times. The Westhampton Fire Department is one of the few healthy and vigorous volunteer departments left in the region, and all of the members are very dedicated and proud to serve the residents and community. Thank you and have a safe and healthy year.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christopher W. Norris
Fire Chief