



INTEGRITY,  
SERVICE,  
TRUST

IN THIS EDITION:

- Message from the Chief
- How Do We Fund Emergency Services?
- Be Fire Safe in the Kitchen

**South Whidbey Fire/EMS**

5579 Bayview Road  
Langley, WA 98260

www.swfe.org

360-321-1533

 SWFireEMS

# FLASH POINT FALL/WINTER 2023

## Newsletter

### MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

By Nick Walsh, Fire Chief



I want to start by saying thank you for your personal and financial support of South Whidbey Fire/EMS. We could not save lives and property without the support of our community. SWFE is an all-hazards fire and rescue department serving residents and visitors on south Whidbey Island. Our community has a population of 15,000, however that number can increase to 25,000 on a daily basis.

I'm the new fire chief and there were two reasons I chose to take this job. First and foremost was the commitment of our volunteer and full-time firefighters. I have never seen such dedication in all my years in the fire service. It's an honor to be part of this team.

The second reason was the solid financial practices of the Board of Fire Commissioners. We take managing your tax dollars seriously. SWFE operates under a balanced budget, and has passed all of its financial and accountability audits by the state.

Many fire districts our size operate with a fire levy capped at \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Our agency asked for – and voters approved – a levy of \$0.95 per \$1,000 in in 2021. This is testimony to SWFE's commitment to deliver cost-effective emergency services.

We are efficient – but we still have challenges. Call volumes are increasing and we are struggling to recruit and retain volunteers. Our community requires additional full-time personnel, a station renovation to house more firefighters to better serve you, and some fire engines need to be replaced.

SWFE is discussing the possibility of a fire levy lid lift during the August 2024 primary election and hope you will participate in these discussions. I welcome your questions at 360-321-1533 or chief@swfe.org. From our SWFE family to yours, we wish you a happy and safe holiday season.

### HOW DO WE FUND EMERGENCY SERVICES?

Daily emergency operations are funded by a fire levy paid through property taxes. Voters approved a fire levy of \$0.95 in 2021. Since that time, the rate has dropped to \$0.81.

The fire levy rate falls as property values rise to limit our budget to the approved amount each year. Each year we are allowed to collect a set amount of revenue. State law limits us to that amount plus a small annual increase that voters approved. Our revenue does not increase at the same rate as property values.

At times, we ask our community for a "lid lift" to fund increasing costs for service. SWFE will start this conversation in early 2024 and hope you will participate.



**AS AVS  
GO UP**

**LEVY RATES  
GO DOWN**





South Whidbey Fire/EMS  
5579 Bayview Road  
Langley, WA 98260  
www.swfe.org | 360-321-1533  
SWFireEMS

PRESORTED STD  
US POSTAGE

PAID

IQ DIRECT  
98201

## SIGN UP FOR E-NEWS!

Get the latest news! Join the monthly e-newsletter distribution by sending your email address to [info@swfe.org](mailto:info@swfe.org).

## BE FIRE SAFE IN THE KITCHEN!

With the holidays approaching, people spend more time in the kitchen cooking for family and friends. Did you know that cooking fires are the leading cause of home fires and home injuries? And the leading cause of fires in the kitchen is unattended cooking?

The good news is that most cooking fires and burns are preventable. Here are some tips to follow:

- Remain in your home while food is cooking.
- Set a timer to remind you that something's hot on the stove or in the oven.
- Keep anything that can catch fire – oven mitts, wooden utensils, food packaging, towels – away from the stove.
- Always follow manufacturer instructions for proper use of air fryers, slow cookers, electric skillet, hot plates, griddles, and other cooking appliances.
- Unplug all appliances when not in use.
- Create a “kid-free zone” of at least 3 feet around the stove and areas where hot food or drinks are.



If a small grease fire occurs on the stovetop, smother the flames by sliding a lid over the pan and turn off the burner. Leave the pan covered until the fire is completely out. For an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door shut. If you have any doubt about fighting a small fire, leave immediately and close the door behind you to help contain the fire. Call 911 from outside your home.

These simple, but effective tips can prevent fires and keep your family safe in the kitchen this holiday season and all year round.