

# **CITY OF MILTON FIRE DEPARTMENT**



## **2020 ANNUAL REPORT**

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As for nearly everyone, 2020 was a very challenging year for the City of Milton Fire Department. The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic has affected most of our operations, has presented many difficulties and forced us to alter department operations to limit risks to personnel and the public. Related alterations to response protocols has led to a dramatic reduction in total emergency response activity. In addition to the issues associated with the pandemic, we participated in the responses to tornados, a major wildfire on Garcon Point and were impacted by a landfalling hurricane and prepared for several other storms that threatened the Gulf Coast. Despite the many challenges faced, the department remains well positioned to manage the challenges of the future.

### EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACTIVITY

This year, due largely to changes in response protocols driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, we experienced a dramatic reduction in the overall number of emergency responses. Even with this reduction, 2020 presented several challenging incidents, requiring more resources than the response of the on-duty initial alarm assignment. The total number of emergency calls decreased by 36.23%, to 1,232 calls, from 1,932 the previous year.

Rescue calls, although still remaining the largest portion of our total call load, decreased markedly this year, now totaling 862 calls, now amounting to 70% of our total emergency activity. This represents over a 45% reduction in Rescue calls from 1,578 in 2019. Rescue calls include: medical emergencies such as strokes, heart attacks, traumatic injuries, falls, etc.; vehicle accidents, including those that involve entrapment, requiring forcible extrication with specialized rescue equipment such as the “Jaws of Life”; as well as other rescue calls like a child locked in a vehicle, elderly who have fallen and need help back into bed (lift assist), and even the occasional animal rescue. In 2020 we responded to 635 medical rescues, 163 vehicle accidents, and 64 other rescue calls. While the number of medical rescues decreased by over 52%, and vehicle accidents decreased by nearly 11%, the number of other rescues held nearly unchanged.

Fire calls, while a smaller portion of our total emergency activity, remain our agency’s primary responsibility, and are actually the segment of our responsibility that requires the greatest resources in terms of equipment, training and personnel. Although many fire related incidents are quickly handled by the on-duty crew, we must always respond with the capacity to rapidly bring the full capabilities of the department to bear to effect rescue, protect exposures, and quickly bring a well-developed working structure fire under control. As we can never know when the next “big one” will occur, we must constantly maintain the readiness necessary to manage that incident. This includes continuous training of personnel and maintenance of vehicles and equipment to ensure that all are ready at a moment’s notice. The number of fire related calls decreased only slightly, down by 6 calls, from 274 in 2019. This year we responded to 268 fire related calls, amounting to 22% of our total responses. These included 57 structure fires, 11 vehicle fires, 9 brush or wildland fires, 133 activated fire alarms or good intent calls, and 58 other fire related calls, such as illegal burning. Activated fire alarms decreased by over 16%, while all other categories remained relatively steady or even increased. Structure fires increased by over 21%, many of these out of our jurisdiction as mutual aid, and vehicle fires increased by 37.5%.

Our smallest category of emergency response, hazardous condition calls, this year again made up 4% of our total emergency activity but represents potentially the most dangerous aspect of our operations, to both our members and the public. These include: natural and liquefied petroleum

(LP) gas incidents; electrical problems such as downed power lines, arcing lines, and transformer fires; fuel leaks and spills; and, all other hazardous conditions such as chemical releases, train derailments, building collapse, and terrorist acts. These incidents potentially involve very dangerous conditions, present almost endless complexity, and often require responders to begin operations with very little information in a very dynamic environment. This year, the number of hazardous condition calls increased by 27.5%, from 80 in 2019. In 2020 the department responded to 102 hazardous condition calls, including 17 natural gas incidents, 34 electrical incidents, 5 fuel leaks or spills, and 46 other hazardous condition calls.

On 102 occasions last year, our department was dispatched to one emergency call while one or more units were already assigned to a previous call (concurrent calls), a substantial decrease from the 184 concurrent calls the previous year. This still means that over 8.2% of our emergency calls were received while our department was already responding to, or on the scene of a prior emergency. On at least 8 occasions we were dispatched to three or more simultaneous calls during the same period. On 10 occasions one or more of the concurrent calls occurred in conjunction with mutual aid provided to another jurisdiction. On 7 occasions a subsequent call was handled by a mutual aid agency providing temporary standby coverage to our district, 4 of these occurred while we were providing mutual aid to another district. In every case an appropriate response was made without undue delay, and no calls have gone unanswered. On 22 occasions Engine 23 was required to respond to a medical emergency in place of Rescue 23, which was managing a previous call. Each of these incidents commits our entire on-duty response capability, leaving no units available to respond to any type of call until one other unit has completed its current assignment and become available to respond to a subsequent call.

While changes in response protocols have resulted in a marked reduction in the total number of emergency calls, with a corresponding reduction in the number of concurrent calls, there remain a troubling number of occasions in which our department is not available to adequately respond to a fire call or other emergency. On at least 12 occasions last year, our department was forced to respond to an incident with less than the designated crew complement necessary to properly manage the incident. In each case, personnel managed to handle the incident without undue difficulties until additional staffing could be freed up or mutual aid resources could arrive. Every time Engine 23 is required to respond to a fire call with less than its normal crew complement of four firefighters, extreme safety concerns and operational limitations occur, hindering our ability to address the immediate demands on the fireground. Under state law, with less than four personnel on the scene, personnel are limited to exterior operations, unable to initiate the aggressive interior operations which allow us to consistently limit fire growth.

In 2020 several significant incidents occurred that presented unique challenges to members of our department. On February 5, during a driving rainstorm, the department was alerted to a vehicle accident involving a “vehicle rolled over in a ditch with possible entrapment” in the area of Highway 90 and Parkmore Plaza Drive. Obviously, such an incident potentially involves a life-threatening situation along with risks to responders, while requiring urgent action. All on-duty resources responded and were initially unable to locate any vehicle in the area. The vehicle was eventually located, partially submerged in a swampy area in the rear of a residential property off Parkmore Plaza Drive. The occupant was found to be deceased, but neither entrapped nor under water, having apparently suffered a medical emergency while driving, the vehicle continuing out of control during the storm from the Parkmore Plaza parking lot, across the open property, and into the swamp. On April 20, multiple tornados struck the county in the Pace and Bagdad areas, requiring the response of several local departments. Our department responded to Pace to assist, investigating several incidents of property damage and entrapment.

During the first week of May, a prescribed burn behind the old Moors Golf Course got out of control and began to burn the swampy, wooded area south of the County Landfill. Area fire departments dealt with the fire for a couple of days. On May 6, a shift in the wind drove the fire rapidly toward the south. Flames soon jumped Interstate-10, necessitating its closure, and began to threaten homes and buildings southeast of the fire. Departments were dispatched from all over the county to attempt to protect homes along Garcon Point Road. Our department remained in district, providing standby coverage for other calls in the central part of the county. By the early evening, many crews had been operating for 8–10 hours without food or rest. Our department worked with several local businesses, who donated food, to arrange meals for the responders on the scene. Chief Reble delivered meals and water to the crews operating on fire lines, providing many of these responders with the only food they had received all day.

The following morning, our department arranged for breakfast for the increasing number of responders and assembled a crew to report to the staging area. Over the next two days, our department provided an engine company, Chief Reble served as Staging Area Manager, and Captain Jim Custred and Lieutenant Steve Maddox served as Strike Team Leaders for the Santa Rosa Strike Team. Captains Lee Devine and Jim Custred each served as Deputy Staging Area Manager. Assisted by two Engine Strike Teams from Central Florida, crews secured fire lines to stop further spread of the fire and mopped up remaining hot spots. Our department also coordinated the many donations of food and drinks from the community, delivering them to the staging area for distribution to responders.

During these operations, on May 8, only minutes after Interstate-10 had reopened, a tractor-trailer rig crashed through a guardrail near the bridge over the Blackwater River and plunged into Blackwater Bay, leaving the driver entrapped in the cab. Units were dispatched, including Rescue 23 and Marine 23, to initiate rescue operations. Nearby units from the Santa Rosa Strike Team operating as part of the wildfire incident responded as well and soon had the patient removed to a civilian vessel which transported him to an awaiting ambulance.

On the evening of Tuesday, September 16, after no less than three previous tropical weather threats within the Gulf of Mexico, the City of Milton prepared for the approach of Hurricane Sally. This fast-moving category-2 hurricane made landfall around 5:00 am near Gulf Shores, Alabama, and moved quickly across the Milton area. In addition to high winds and nearly two feet of rainfall, our area experienced unexpectedly intense storm surge flooding, leaving several people trapped in flooded residents. As soon as dangerous winds receded, all units from our department deployed to answer calls for assistance, perform damage assessment and conduct search and rescue operations. Over the next 16 hours, our department responded to 35 calls, rescuing 10 people, including an infant and two dogs, from flooded homes, transporting 4 to the emergency storm shelter, clearing roadways, securing hazards and responding to two mutual aid structure fires. By the end of the day, all entrapped persons had been rescued and all streets had been cleared to provide emergency access to all protected properties within the city.

## MUTUAL AID

Maintenance of effective mutual aid agreements remains a critical element in our overall ability to effectively protect our community. While we manage the vast majority of emergency calls with on-duty personnel, supplemented when necessary by the recall of off-duty personnel, incidents do arise wherein the resources of the City of Milton Fire Department alone are not sufficient to manage the situation. In these circumstances, we must call on the support of surrounding fire departments to assemble a coordinated response structure. During calendar year 2020 our department provided mutual aid to surrounding departments on 53 occasions, and received mutual aid on 17 occasions, amounting to 4.3% and 1.4% of total calls, respectively. The number of incidents in which mutual aid was provided by our department increased dramatically from 33 in 2019. 25 of these calls involved working structure fires where department personnel and resources were involved in active firefighting operations. The number of incidents in which mutual aid was requested from other departments decreased by two from 19 the prior year.

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In 2008, in response to the world-wide Avian Flu Pandemic, under our role as primary emergency management agency for the City of Milton, the department developed a Pandemic Annex to the City of Milton Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. This plan provided guidance for response to developing pandemic conditions and established a standing cache of necessary supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) to be kept on hand in the event that conditions ever warranted implementation of the plan. This plan was never implemented until mid-March 2020, when, based on guidance from the CDC, Governor Ron DeSantis' Office, and the Florida Departments of Health and Emergency Management, in conjunction with Santa Rosa County Emergency Management and Health Departments, the City implemented this plan in response to the developing COVID-19 Pandemic. In accordance with this plan, protective measures were implemented, and non-essential services were suspended.

The fire department, in coordination with the Florida Fire Chiefs Association, Florida Department of Health, Santa Rosa County Emergency Management and the Santa Rosa County Firefighters' Association, implemented access restrictions to department facilities and suspended all non-essential public interactions, including station tours and similar public education activities. At the direction of Santa Rosa County Emergency Medical Director Dr. Kim Landry, the department implemented enhanced personnel protective measures and adjusted response orders to suspend most responses to long-term care facilities and reduce the number of medical emergency calls to which we respond to include only those calls which present an immediate threat to life. This adjustment led to a substantial reduction in overall emergency response activity, but also greatly reduced our exposures to potentially infected individuals and our potential risk to our patients. While these adjustments would have never been anticipated apart from the pandemic, it has been found by all agencies involved that these changes have had no adverse impact on patient outcomes. All agencies have agreed to permanently continue with these adjustments.

Over the course of the pandemic, three members have contracted the disease while off duty. Four others were placed on administrative leave with pay as a precaution due to suspected exposures. There has been no internal spread, and no members have contracted the disease in conjunction with department operations. Although incurring overtime, we have been able to consistently maintain normal staffing.

## VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT

Our fleet of emergency apparatus is in generally good shape but has suffered several maintenance issues over the past year. Our second-due engine spent weeks out of service and was sent twice to out of town maintenance facilities for repairs. As a consequence, we spent many weeks relying on our reserve apparatus to sustain our operations. Our first-due engine has also experienced several maintenance issues and will be out of service for repairs. Despite these equipment lapses, we were able to maintain our normal level of service in the city at all times. A new front-line fire engine is due for purchase in 2022. We will finalize the development of bid specifications for this new vehicle this year.

The Fire Chief's former command vehicle (2001 Chevy Tahoe) was purchased used from the city of Longwood, Florida in 2004, with 53,000 miles on it. It had accrued over 125,000 miles and suffered numerous mechanical and electrical problems during its lifetime, including catching fire twice due to electrical issues. The replacement for this vehicle, a new 2020 Chevy Tahoe, was purchased from Alan Jay Chevrolet in Sebring, Florida through a statewide competitive bid contract. This vehicle was delivered in mid-March, and lighting, siren, electronics and graphics were installed, and this new vehicle was placed in service in July. The former vehicle will be auctioned off as surplus property.

Three Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) were installed in the three front-line vehicles to provide improved dispatch information. These laptop style computer terminals are mounted on custom mounting bracket and connect to the internet through mobile "hot spot" modems. They allow us to receive data and dispatch information, including mapping, directly from the Santa Rosa County Dispatch Center while responding to a call. These will be especially helpful when responding outside of our customary coverage area in response to a mutual aid request. A desktop computer was also installed in the watchroom providing real-time access to dispatch information, including mapping.

The breathing air cylinders that we utilize for our Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) only have a 15-year life cycle. 12 of our 41 existing SCBA cylinders went out of service this last year and were retired from service. 15 additional cylinders will go out of service in March of this year. The remaining 14 cylinders will go out of date in 2026. Our existing fleet of MSA FireHawk Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) range in age from 8 to 15 years old, and compatible units are no longer available for purchase. As new units are purchased with new fire engine in 2022, they will necessarily be a new model. This will necessitate replacement of individually issued facepieces to each member that are compatible with new units, and replacement of front-line in-service units on Rescue and second-due engine to remain operational with a compatible fleet of SCBA. Existing SCBA will soon no longer be supported by the manufacturer. We plan to replace all cylinders over the next two years and all current SCBA next year with new, fully compliant models.

## PERSONNEL

After a Firefighter resigned in August, we initiated a selection process to fill the resulting vacancy. In October, Austin Kisner was hired to fill the vacant position.

This year represented the second year of a three-year collective bargaining agreement between the City of Milton and the Milton Professional Firefighters – Local 2944. The firefighters' local elected not to exercise their option to reopen one article of the agreement.

## TRAINING

As always, training remains a vital part of the fire department's normal activity. With the wide array of situations to which the department is called to respond, it is imperative that all members of the department remain current and proficient in all areas of firefighting, basic life support, technical rescue, hazardous materials, etc. In accordance with the department's annual training calendar, each member undergoes a minimum of 20 hours of in-service training each month. In addition to this company training, many members have participated in additional specialized training. All members were recertified in CPR and all EMTs renewed their certifications.

In June the department conducted multi-company training at the former Mayo property on Broad Street. The city had purchased this property, which contained four separate residential dwellings that were slated for demolition. The availability of these buildings provided a unique opportunity for us to conduct realistic multi-company fire attack, search and rescue, mayday, and Rapid Intervention Team evolutions in complex environments without concern for damage to the facility. While this training did not involve live fire, using hay smoke, several realistic scenarios were created to test and exercise skills associated with firefighting operations in residential properties, including firefighter rescue operations. Special emphasis was placed on firefighter MAYDAY, escape drills and allowing junior officers to exercise Command responsibilities.

Firefighter Kyle Muldoon attended a fire attack and search course, and Firefighter/EMT Benjamin Stockdale attended a vehicle extrication course at the Northwest Florida Fire Expo. Firefighter/EMT Jesse Floyd completed "Private Fire Protection Systems" and "Tactics and Strategy II" as part of his Associates of Science Degree Program through Saint Petersburg State College (SPSC). Lieutenant Daryl Auerbach completed "Community Relations and Theory" as part of his Bachelor's in Public Safety Degree Program through SPSC. Lieutenant Steve Maddox completed "World History," Principles of Science and Investigation," "Elementary Algebra," and "U.S. History" as part of his Associates of Science Degree Program through Florida State College at Jacksonville. Captain Jim Custred Completed "Community Relations and Theory" as part of his Bachelor's in Public Safety Degree Program through SPSC. Firefighters Kyle Muldoon and Austin Kisner both successfully completed Emergency Medical Technician training and should soon become state certified EMTs. Chief Reble completed "NFPA 1/101 Update" and "Crowd Manager Training," fulfilling all requirements to renew his Fire Inspector I certification.

## PUBLIC EDUCATION

While internal training is a crucial element of department operations, external public education remains a very important element of the department's overall fire prevention program. The department attempts to offer a diversified public education program in an effort to reach all age groups throughout the community. The pandemic forced us to curtail nearly all of our public education activities by mid-March. During 2020 the fire department conducted only one school program, reaching 100 students, one fire extinguisher class, reaching 50 persons and one other program, reaching 31 people, for a total of 3 programs reaching 181 people.

Our department provides Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and First Aid training to target groups. We will gladly arrange classes for groups that desire such training. Through the department's Training Center, headed by Lieutenant/EMT Steve Maddox, 5 individuals were certified in Community CPR and First Aid last year. All members of the fire department were recertified in BLS CPR. Chief Reble and Lieutenant Maddox renewed as Instructors, and Lieutenant Maddox as Instructor Trainer.

## FIRE PREVENTION AND LIFE SAFETY

The City of Milton Fire Department is also responsible for enforcement of the Florida Fire Prevention Code and Life Safety Code. Chief Reble serves as Life Safety Officer and Fire Official for the City of Milton. Despite the impacts of the pandemic, business and development activities continued, and inspections and permitting continued at almost the same pace. This year Chief Reble conducted 36 Life Safety inspections, 9 Follow-up inspections, 16 Construction related inspections, and 45 plan reviews, totaling 106 inspections and reviews, a reduction of only 10 from the previous year.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The City of Milton Fire Department has maintained a long tradition of active community involvement. The impacts of the pandemic, and its associated curtailment of most public gatherings, however, has severely limited our capacity to engage in community events. Despite this, we did continue with a few long-standing traditions. Engine 23 and Rescue 23 participated in the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Parade in January, carried the Milton High Panther in the Homecoming Parade in November, and again delivered Santa Claus at the end of the annual Milton Christmas Parade in December. Marine 23 again led the Pyrates' Lighted Boat Parade on the Blackwater River in December.

## INTO THE FUTURE

2020 presented many unexpected challenges to the fire department. The work of the past several years, however, had put our department in a very strong position to meet these many challenges. We remain confident of our ability to meet the demands of serving and protecting the residents of Milton. We are very well positioned to meet the challenges of the future. We must continue to closely monitor department staffing needs in order to insure that we will remain always ready to provide the high level of service that our citizens have come to consistently expect from our department. We will also continue to monitor and prepare for the effects of future growth, including the development of multi-story properties that further drive the need for additional equipment and personnel.

Our fleet of equipment is in good shape to meet the continued demands of protecting the lives and property of our citizens well into the future. Our fire station facility is well-suited to serve our current needs for many years to come. With the pending development of a new integrated training facility, we eagerly anticipate opportunities to continue to enhance our skills and operational capabilities to provide an even higher level of service to our community. We will continue to examine all aspects of our operations to ensure that we remain at the highest readiness to meet the demands of any emergency that we may encounter. We look forward to continuing our tradition of dedicated service to our community.

**City of Milton Fire Department  
Always Ready ... Always There**



# CITY OF MILTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

## MONTHLY ACTIVITY REPORT

### CALENDAR YEAR 2020

#### ACTIVITY REPORT

#### ALARM RESPONSES

#### FIRE CALLS

TYPE:	Vehicle Fire	Structure Fire	Brush Fire	Alarm*	Other**	Total
TOTAL:	11	57	9	133	58	268

\* Includes false and unintentional alarms, smoke scares, good intent, etc.

\*\* Includes fire investigations, unauthorized burns, etc.

#### RESCUE CALLS

TYPE:	Medical Response	Vehicle Accident / Extrication	Other	Total
TOTAL:	635	163	64	862

#### HAZARDOUS CONDITION CALLS

TYPE:	Natural Gas*	Electrical Problems**	Fuel Leak/Spill	Other	Total
TOTAL:	17	34	5	46	102

\* Includes gas leaks, smell of gas, etc.

\*\* Includes downed power lines, transformer fires, arcing wires, etc.

MUTUAL AID TOTAL: GIVEN:	53	4.30%	RECEIVED:	17	1.38%
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**TOTAL CALLS FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2020** **1232**

**TOTAL CALLS FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2019** **1932**

**PERCENTAGE INCREASE: -36.23%**

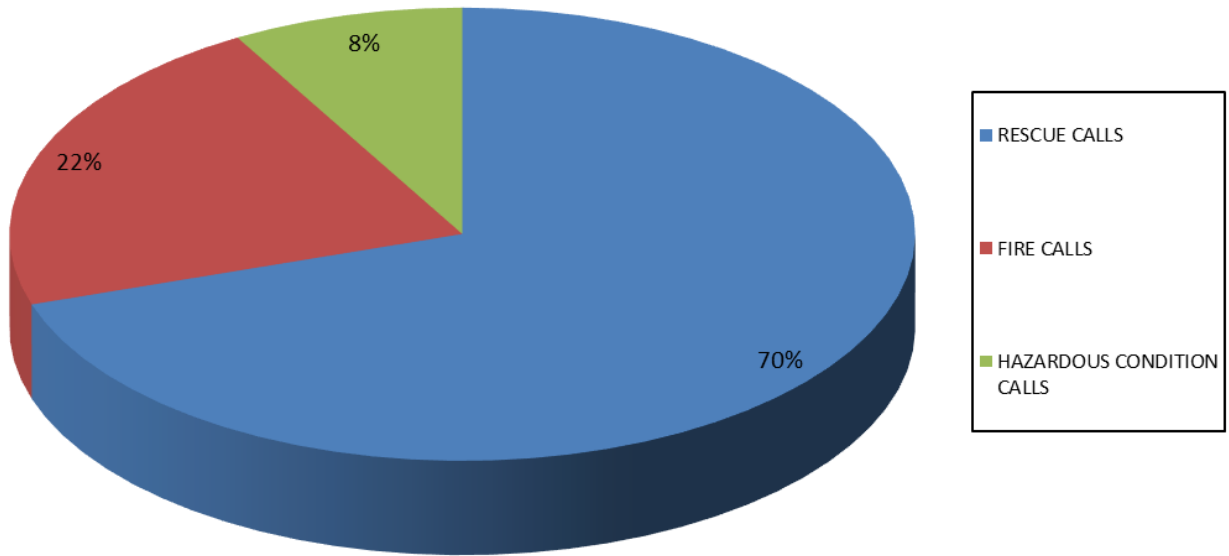
#### PUBLIC EDUCATION

TYPE OF PROGRAM:	School Class	Extinguisher Demo	Fire Drill	Other	Total
Number Conducted:	1	1	0	1	3
Number Attending:	100	50	0	31	181

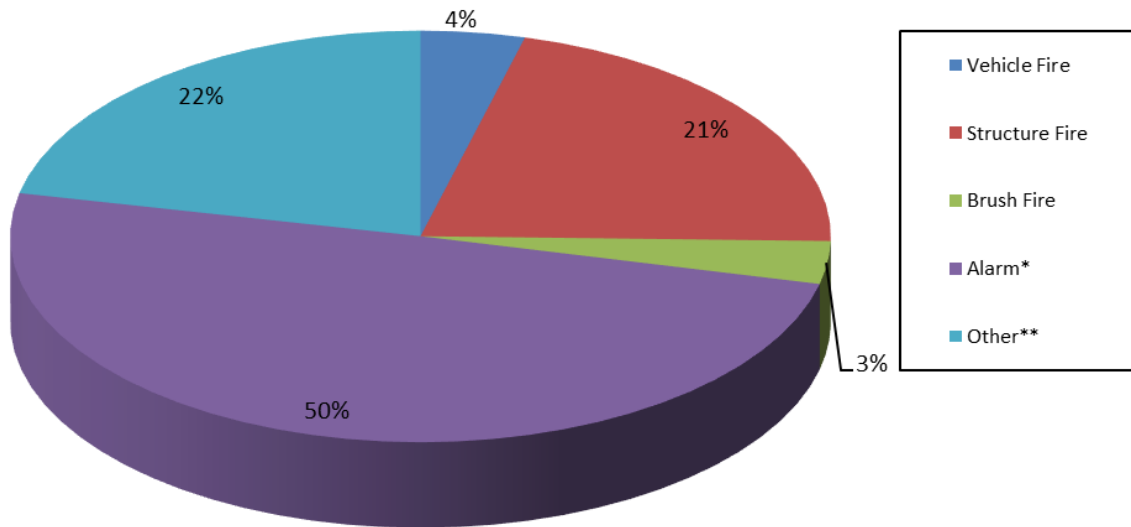
#### LIFE SAFETY

TYPE:	Life Safety Insp	Follow-up	Construction	Pre-plan	Plan Review	Total
Number:	36	9	16	0	45	106

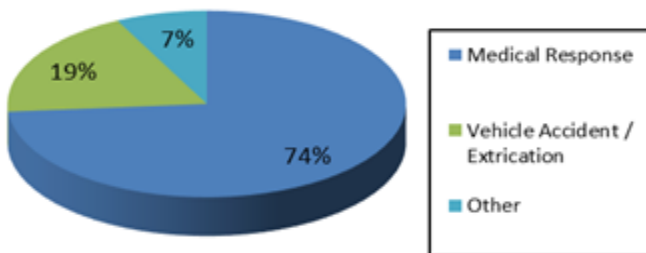
# EMERGENCY RESPONSES CALENDAR YEAR 2019



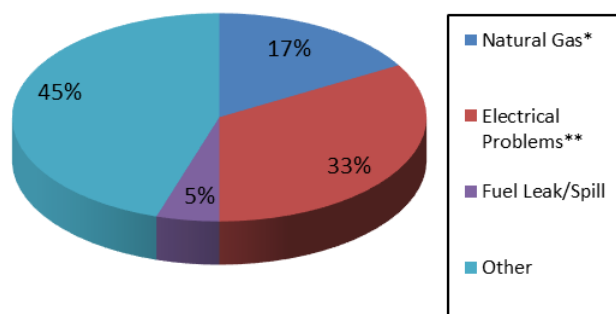
## FIRE CALLS



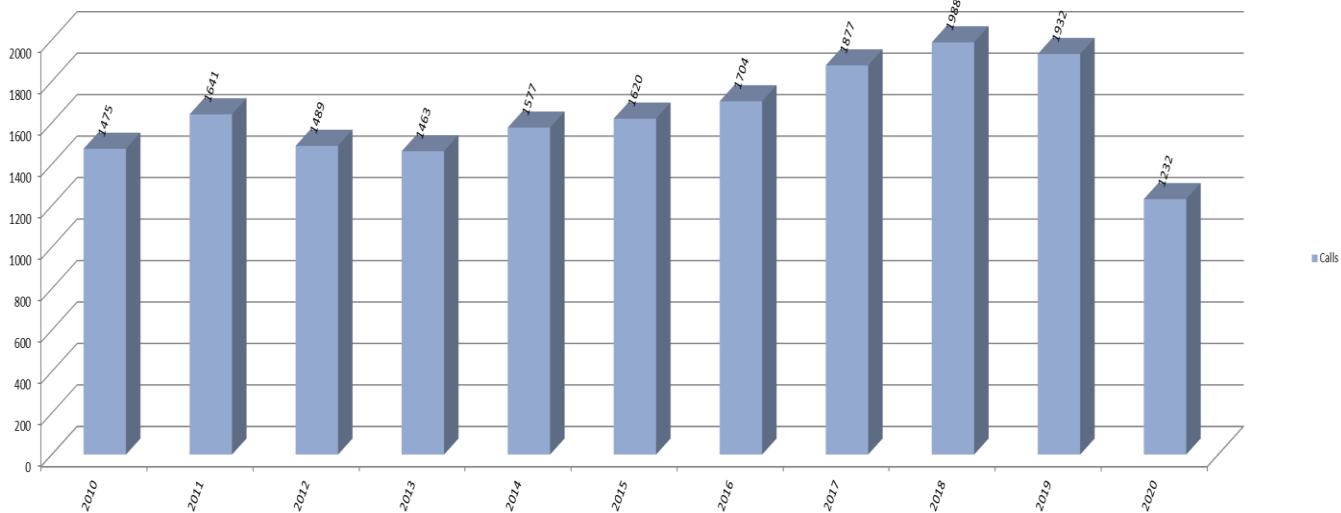
## RESCUE CALLS



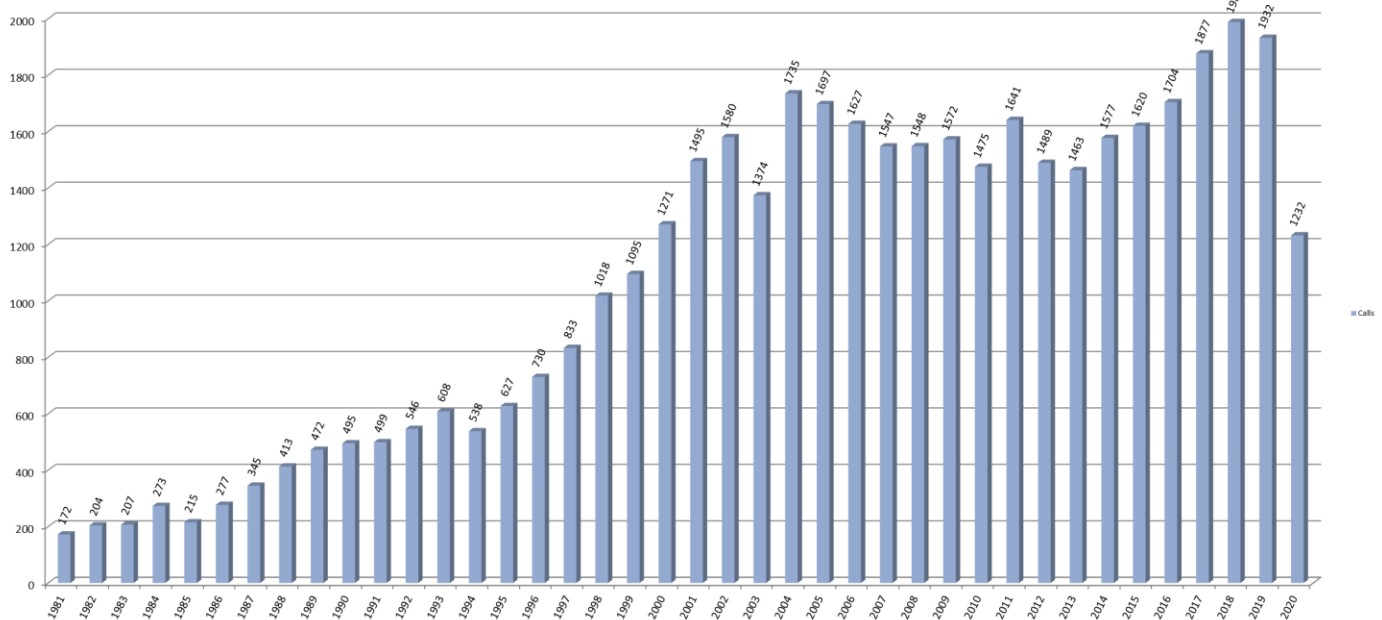
## HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS



### Emergency Calls 2010 - 2020



### Emergency Calls 1980 - 2020



### Annual Cost Comparison

