

-Part 1 about the fire department and how to become a Sylvania Firefighter

Firefighting work is community specific, meaning that each community fire department is built around the type of community it is charged to protect. This gives us the different types of fire department models present today - volunteer, paid and many combinations in-between. In Sylvania, we have what is called a combination department. We use both full-time and part-time employees staffed on shift every day.

Let's start out by finding out what it takes to become a firefighter in Sylvania. Many people say "anybody can be a firefighter" - that statement is just not true. It takes a special type of person to be a firefighter. To be able to see life, death and destruction, in many different forms every day takes its toll on a person and their mental and physical health. Because of that fact and possible exposure to smoke and other toxic materials while on the job, firefighters face a higher risk than the general population for many health concerns such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, to name a few. Firefighters also need to be trustworthy. The community expects professionalism, confidence and trust from its firefighters, and holds them to a higher standard of conduct, both on *and* off duty. Your Sylvania firefighters work hard to earn and maintain your trust and confidence through our professionalism and high ethical standards.

To be considered for a full-time firefighter position in Sylvania you must already have an Ohio paramedic license. A cognitive reading, writing and math test, along with a personality test is given to start the eligibility process. Physical fitness is next. Numerous studies have shown that firefighters working on an active fire ground have the same or higher demands put upon their bodies as athletes on a playing field, so a physical fitness test is given. This is followed by a psychological exam, a complete medical physical exam, drug and tobacco test and a cardiac stress test. There is also a detailed criminal and background check completed, and finally an interview with management of the fire department. All results are put together and the applicants are placed on a list in the order of total results for consideration of being hired.

Firefighters maintain skills and certifications in a seemingly endless variety of topics that include: Emergency medical care, hazardous materials, computers and technology, public education, fire protection systems, apparatus and equipment operation and maintenance, public relations and of course firefighting. Continuing education is required to maintain these certifications throughout a firefighter's career, which are renewed every three years in Ohio. Basic training for a firefighter/paramedic is over 1160 hours of lecture, lab and clinical work. This works out to be at least 65 college credit hours. There are also associate, bachelor and master degree programs available in Fire Science and Management and Emergency Medical Management at area and on-line colleges and many of your Sylvania fire fighters have already completed or are working on advancing their education. The entrance testing process in Sylvania is the same for both full and part-time firefighter candidates.

Firefighters in Sylvania work a 24 hour shift on-duty and then have 48 hours off-duty. This schedule averages out to be a 56 hour work week over a 28 day cycle. Because of rules in the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act, firefighters can work up to an average of 53 hours a week in the work cycle without being

paid overtime. Why do fire departments schedule such long shifts instead of a normal 8 hour shift? Staffing costs are the biggest reason. To have firefighters work shorter shifts, more firefighters would need to be hired as there would be more shifts that need covered; the chance of overtime at 3 separate shift changes instead of 1 due to emergency calls increases, and the firefighter overtime exemption from the Fair Labor Standards Act would no longer apply. The 24/48 shift is the most economical. The chief officers (Fire Chief and 2 Deputy Chief's) work a normal office schedule Monday through Friday. They also rotate every third week being "on-call", providing supervision and command during emergency incidents. This on-call time requires them to be "married" to their radio and department command vehicle, staying in Sylvania ready to respond at any time for an emergency.

-Part 2 how the fire department responds to your call for help

How does the fire department respond when you call 911? The 911 system in Lucas County uses a tiered system. That means each call is dispatched based on its specific need. The first response for any call in Lucas County and in most of the United States is from the fire department, as firehouses are strategically placed throughout a community based on the Public Protection Classification from the Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO) and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) guidelines. In Sylvania, your call (from a land line) would either go through our township police/fire dispatcher if you live in the township or through the city police dispatcher then to our dispatchers if you live in the city of Sylvania. If you dial 911 from a cell phone, it will go to the nearest dispatch center of the cell tower you connect to; your information is then relayed to our dispatchers. If you dial 419-882-0022, your call will go directly to our dispatchers every time. If you are reporting a medical emergency, your call may be transferred to Lucas County EMS (LCEMS) who has specially trained Emergency Medical Dispatchers to further evaluate your needs. From the LCEMS phone evaluation, either a Lucas County EMS Life Squad would be dispatched for any needed Advanced Life Support (ALS) transport or a private ambulance company would be sent if Basic Life Support (BLS) transport is needed. The Sylvania Fire Department currently does not provide ambulance transportation service. All Sylvania fire engines and ladder trucks units are staffed and equipped for ALS service to provide the best care available as soon as they arrive. Sylvania was the first fire department in Lucas County to provide 100% ALS care from all first due fire engines and ladder trucks. Your Sylvania Fire Department has been recognized by Lucas County EMS, along with Life Squad #6 (based in Sylvania and staffed with your Sylvania firefighters) for having a cardiac arrest save rate 16% higher than the rest of the LCEMS system as a whole.

Each Fire Engine and Ladder Truck is staffed with a minimum of 3 firefighters. Each call receives a response from the fire department based on what is needed. National standards of care for EMS calls require a minimum of 3 providers per patient for Basic Life Support and 5 providers for Advanced Life Support. For all calls the fire department sends the closest fire unit. A vehicle crash will have multiple fire units dispatched. This is to be prepared for the potential of multiple victims and to take care of any fire, fluid leaks that could cause environmental damage or patient extrication needs. The fire engines are also used to protect the firefighters and police officers working the crash scene from on-coming traffic.

Your Sylvania Fire Department maintains a minimum of 12 firefighters on-duty every day, staffing 3 Engines and 1 Ladder Truck plus 2 firefighters on the LCEMS Life Squad operating from 4 firehouses. For

a reported structure fire (dispatched as a 'Regular Alarm') we respond 2 Engine's, the Ladder Truck, a Life Squad and a chief officer (9 firefighters + the Life Squad for medical and chief for command) as well as an automatic aid Engine from Springfield Twp. FD. If smoke and/or fire are reported, the last Sylvania Engine will also respond and Toledo Fire & Rescue Department will be called to fill-in at a Sylvania firehouse.

Why do we need that many firefighters responding to a structure fire? Firefighting is very labor intensive and task specific. The majority of the tasks that need to be completed at a fire need to be completed in conjunction with other tasks. A better way to put it is - all the tasks need to be done right away, not later, as each task affects the other. National standards recommend that a minimum of 15 firefighters are needed on scene of a typical 2000 square foot residence (with no basement or exposures). The standards stipulate the first fire engine should arrive within 4 minutes and the remainder of the responding units arrive in no more than 8 minutes, and that all responding fire engines and ladder trucks have a minimum of 4 firefighters on each of them. A study of fire-ground tasks completed in 2010 by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) reinforces the NFPA Standard of staffing, and the OSHA (Occupational Safety & Health Administration) rules requiring 2 firefighters outside and ready for rescue when 2 enter a dangerous area. What do these firefighters do? 1 is the Incident Commander, 1 is the scene Safety Officer and Aid to the commander, a minimum of 1 pump operator, 3 firefighters on the first fire attack hose line, 3 firefighters for a back-up hose line, a minimum of 2 firefighters to ventilate the structure of smoke & hot gases, a minimum of 2 firefighters as a rescue/safety team, 2 firefighters for scene support, completing duties such as hydrant hook-up, utility control, forcible entry if needed and placing ground ladders. More firefighters are needed based on many factors including if there are injured people, multiple fire engines flowing water, an aerial ladder is being used or it is a larger home or a commercial building. More fire fighters are also needed to be able to rotate the working crews for relief with fresh crews, especially in extreme weather.

-Part 3 – what do we do all day?

Now, what do firefighters do all day? I have heard that we play cards or checkers, watch TV and sleep most of the day with an occasional emergency call to break thing up. This could not be further from the truth.

Let's start our shift with an hour by hour breakdown of a day in the life of the Sylvania Fire Department.

0700 hours – Firefighters report to duty for their 24 hour shift at 7am. The officer at each fire house will receive a report from the off-going shift officer covering any information such as road construction, fire hydrants that may be out of service, any alarm or sprinkler systems in the district that are out of service or new ones placed into service, any issues with the fire apparatus, equipment or issues with the firehouse. After that exchange is completed, the crew will start a complete check of the fire apparatus and all equipment to assure it is in place and operationally ready, the medications used by the paramedics are checked as well. When responding to a fire or EMS incident, firefighters and the company officer (Lieutenant) will need to make decisions immediately on what to do to mitigate an emergency, and need to know the equipment is ready the first time – every time. Once all fire trucks

and equipment are checked, the firefighters turn their attention to “cleaning house”. The firehouse is their home for the next 24 hours, and the crew is the family living and working there that day. All areas of the firehouse are cleaned and mopped, and on the weekends the outside areas and yards are maintained as well by the firefighters. The morning checks and cleaning work takes up the first hour of the day and then some.

Emergency Calls – crews from the Engine at firehouse #1 were dispatched to an EMS call at 0652 hours and returned after shift change. A report was then completed by the officer of that crew.

0800 hours – into the second hour of the shift and the crews at each station gather for the regular morning conference call with the chief officers. This call is made to cover the planned activities of the day and any issues or questions the crews may have with the other stations or the office staff. After this the crews will finish any morning cleaning and equipment checks not yet finished, and start their physical fitness exercises. It has been proven in numerous studies across the nation that physically fit firefighters have a lower rate of on-the-job injuries. The firefighters’ exercise equipment at all four fire stations in Sylvania was purchased through grant money awarded to the fire department. The fire department also has three firefighters who are certified as Peer Fitness Trainers. They evaluate and design a specific exercise plan for each fire fighter.

Emergency Calls – 08038 - EMS call 0840 - EMS call.

0900 – 1100 hours – The day gets into full swing now as the firefighters start the normal workday projects. The day chosen for this 24 series was a Tuesday. The normal workdays are set by the day of the week. Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays are assigned training days for all crews. Mondays and Tuesdays as well as Saturdays are days for the crews to make-up missed training and also concentrate on completing fire safety inspections. All full-time firefighters are trained and certified by the State of Ohio as Certified Fire Safety Inspectors. Crews visit each business or commercial building as assigned to assure the buildings are compliant with the Ohio Fire Code, working to assure that businesses are safe and free of fire or safety hazards for the employees and the public. This also gives the firefighters a chance to see the inside of a building before they may have to enter it during an emergency. The fire department also makes drawings of the buildings and notes any special hazards inside to serve as a reminder to crews responding for an emergency of the building layout, any hazards, where the nearest fire hydrant is and where the gas and electric shut-offs are located. We call these pre-plans, as we must be prepared for an emergency before it happens. This morning a couple of the crews are working on make-up training that was missed because of emergency calls. Two other crews are starting their inspections for the day. At some point during the 11 o’clock hour you may possibly find a fire engine at one of the local grocery stores. Since the firefighters are on-duty for the full 24 hours with no “off the clock” time for lunch or dinner, they all chip-in money for their food and stop at the grocery store. Yes, you read that correctly, the firefighters buy their own food. That is a question asked of the fire department administration many times. The firefighters will then return to their stations and prepare the food for lunch.

Emergency Calls: 1031 - EMS call 1108 - EMS call

1111 - EMS call 1121 - EMS call

1135 - EMS call (at this point – all fire units are out – no one is left to respond)

1158 - EMS call for injury auto crash (2 units respond)

1200 - 1300 hours – crews are at lunch during this hour. Because they are on-duty for the full 24 hours, any time an emergency call is received, they must leave and respond. Today, lunch was late for two crews on the injury auto crash, the others were not interrupted.

1300 – 1630 hours (1pm to 4:30pm) – The firefighters return to their normal Tuesday duties. All crews but Engine 63 are out completing commercial business Fire Safety Inspections. Engine 63 spent time at a local school providing fire safety education to 70 children and adults, and then started their assigned fire safety inspections.

Emergency Calls: 1507 – Regular Alarm Fire Call for a building fire (small fire found & extinguished)

1538 – EMS call

1630 – 1800 hours (4:30 – 6:00pm) - Firefighters spend the late afternoon finishing up paperwork and reports from the days inspections and emergency calls and start preparing their supper. Each station officer has certain responsibilities in the department, and this time is also used for completing those tasks. An example, the officers are responsible for the quality control of all EMS reports. They spend the late afternoons and many evenings and weekends checking those reports.

Emergency Calls: 1643 – Regular Alarm Fire Call (fire found next to a structure extinguished)

1817 – Regular Alarm Fire Call (fire in a kitchen was extinguished)

1900 – 2200 hours (7pm – 10pm) - After dinner (which was interrupted tonight) and the related clean-up, the evening time is spent with any assigned activities such as public education to groups that may have scheduled a fire station tour, or the firefighters may go to a local organization meeting to give a presentation. Many times you will find firefighters hitting the books, studying for the required continuing education, or studying college related courses to advance their fire education. Many of your Sylvania Firefighters have a degree or are taking classes to obtain one.

Emergency calls: 1945 – EMS call - water rescue, possible drowning

2107 – EMS call

2132 – Fire call

2200 to 0700 (10pm to 7am) – the night time at the firehouse can be peaceful and quiet or busy. It sometimes runs in streaks. Tonight is about average for emergency calls.

Emergency calls: 2250 – EMS call

2337 – EMS call

0048 – EMS call

0414 – Fire Call - Commercial fire alarm

This 24 hour shift is done. Crews responded to 19 emergency incidents, completed 37 fire safety inspections, made up 4 hours of training and provided 70 children & adults with fire safety education.

Last year (2013) your fire department made over 7000 emergency responses in service to our community, completed over 3800 fire safety inspections and re-inspections and made contact with thousands of children and adults providing fire and safety education as well as firehouse and fire truck tours.

This is just one glimpse into the day of your Sylvania Fire Department. Each day brings something a little bit different, which is the challenge that all firefighters love. If you have any questions about the Sylvania Fire Department, please feel free to give us a call. We are here for you 24/7.