



2023 Annual Report



Introduction

Okanogan County Fire District 6 (District) is pleased to present our 2023 Annual Report. This report provides an overview of the many accomplishments achieved by the Commissioners, Staff, and Firefighters on behalf of the residents and visitors to the Methow Valley.

Okanogan County Fire District 6 (District) is a volunteer fire district with 48 volunteers and 5 full time paid staff. The paid staff consists of the Chief, Assistant Chief, and 3 Captains and operates on a 40-hour work week, typically Monday through Friday. The volunteers have a Station Captain and 4 Station Lieutenants. Volunteers operate on a 24/7 basis 365 days a year. Personnel are assigned to one of 4 stations located throughout the District at approximately 10 road-mile spacing. The stations are located to optimize response time to an incident over the 300 square mile coverage area of the District.

Overall, the year was relatively calm with no major wildland fires and only 3 significant structure fires. Unfortunately, motor vehicle accidents represents one of the emergency incident types we are most frequently called to respond to. 'Good Intention' calls continue to increase as the public has heightened awareness of the dangers of wildland fires in the 'Wildland Urban Interface' environment and they strive to provide early warning of a fire.

The firefighter training program benefitted by fully integrating our new 'Fire Training Structure' and 'Winthrop Station Training Grounds' into our weekly training routine and the 'Recruit', 'Firefighter I', and 'Emergency Vehicle Incident Prevention' driver/operator training programs. Our 'Firefighter Vocational Training Program' also took a significant step forward with the hiring of Captain David Dodge to organize and run the program.



The voters in the Town of Twisp and the Fire District passed resolutions to incorporate Twisp into the Fire District. This is a significant step forward in providing an integrated fire protection district in the Methow Valley. The District now owns all four fire stations, Mazama, Winthrop, Twisp, and Carlton.

The information contained within this report will provide you insight into the Administration, Organizational Structure, Operations, and Fire Prevention activities conducted on a day-to-day basis by the Staff and Volunteers of Okanogan County Fire District 6.

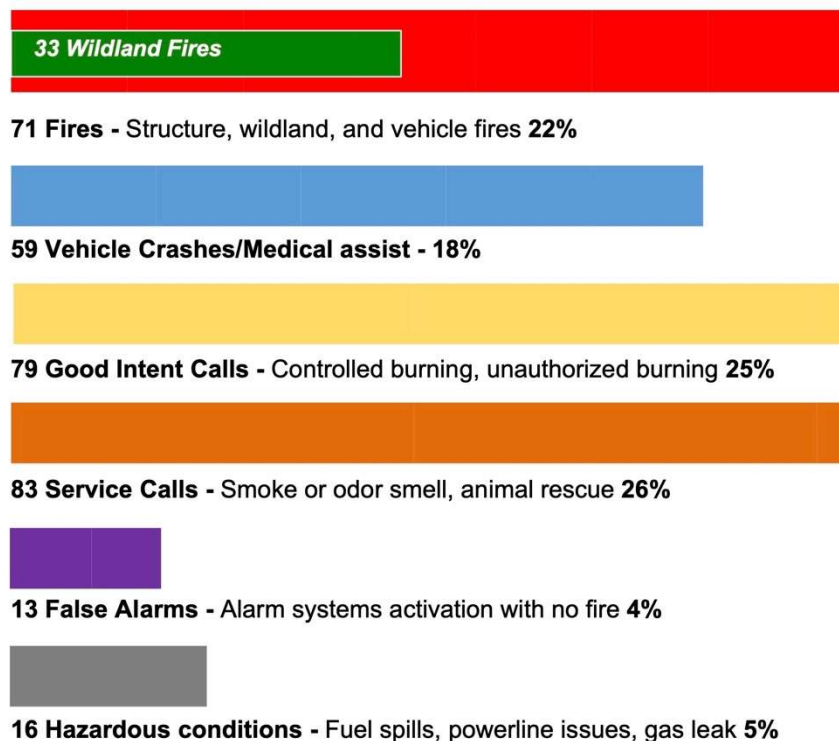
The District Commissioners, Staff, and Firefighters are grateful for the support of the Community and look forward to serving the Methow Valley residents and visitors in 2024.

Emergency Incidents

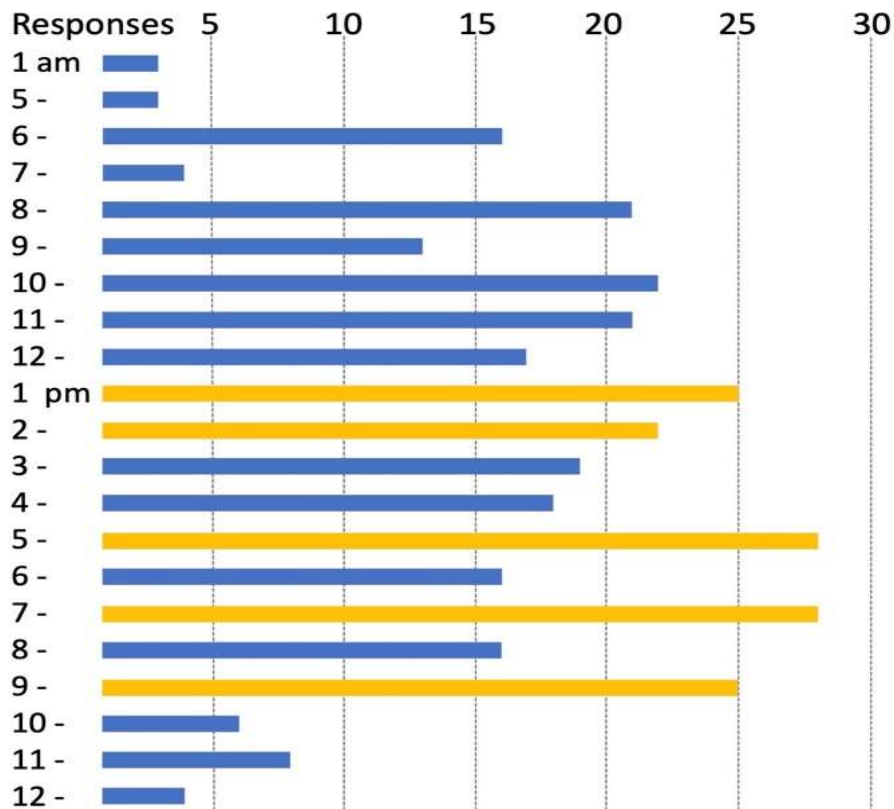
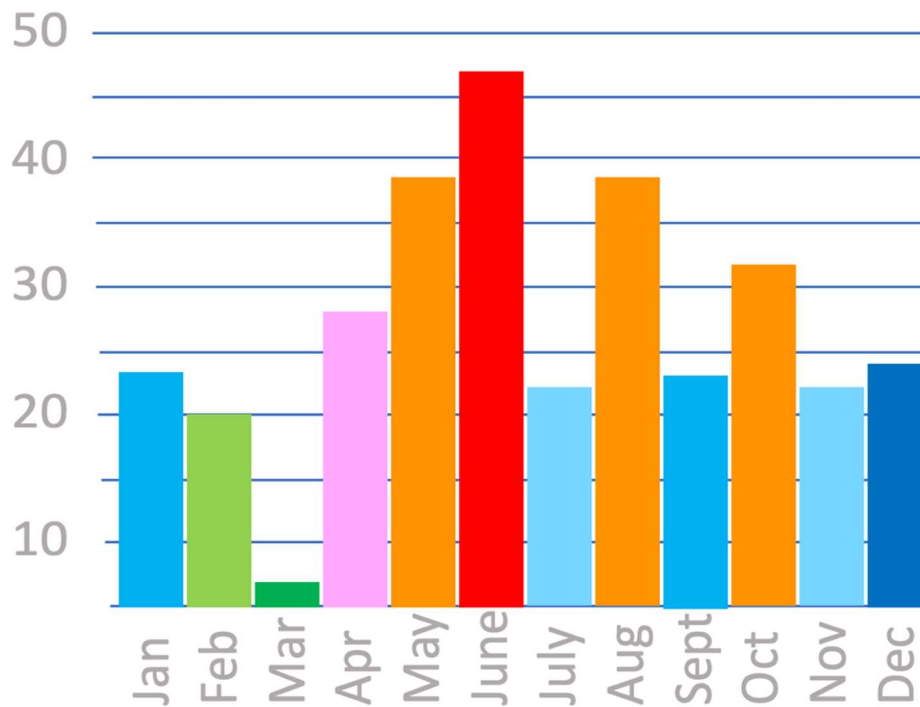
Okanogan County Fire District 6 had 321 emergency incident responses in 2023, an increase of 10% over 2022. The busiest quarter for incidents was April, May, June, with 112 calls, representing 35% of the year's total calls. We were fortunate that there were only 33 wildland fires, 36% less than 2022, and all were quickly contained. Firefighters spent over 2127 hours on scene at incidents.



2023 = 321 Emergency Responses



2023 Responses by Month of Year



2023 Responses by Time of Day



During a very snowy day in early January firefighters were called to a report of a structure fire along Highway 20 south of Winthrop. Upon arrival at the location there was no visible structure. Heavy snow on the ground and a long uphill, unplowed drive that was bermed-in at the highway made the incident impossible to access for fire apparatus and CO-OP utility crews. Firefighters hiked in to locate the structure and found that a tree had fallen on the power lines and caused one line to break and fall on the ground next to

the structure's porch. The line was arching to the ground and causing a steam cloud that made it look like the structure was on fire. Upon investigation, no fire was found. However, the firefighters were fortunate that when the considerable amount of snow on the roof let loose, they were all clear of the ensuing avalanche. Situation awareness training has its

benefits. Please keep your driveways plowed and access to your doors shoveled throughout the winter.



On Ground Hog Day, a fire sprinkler pipe at Jamie's Place broke, flooding the entire building. All residents and staff were able to exit the building without injuries. A similar incident happened in the same building about one year ago.

On a snowy and very cold evening in early February the historic Carlton Mall caught fire. All 4 stations responded. In spite of a quick response by the Carlton Station and the efforts of the firefighters the building was declared a complete loss. All occupants of the building were able to escape without injury.

The wildland fire season started early with the report of several small ground fires at the north end of Patterson Lake on 29 March. They turned out to be unattended burn piles and were quickly extinguished.



Overall, the Valley did not experience catastrophic wildland fires and the Valley was relatively smoke free throughout the summer. Wildland fires ignited in the North Cascades National Park Diablo Lake and Blue Lake regions. Highway 20 was closed periodically due to fire operations along the highway. Smoke and poor air quality occurred in the Valley periodically throughout the summer. District personnel stayed apprised of the situation by regularly attending incident briefings in order to have a response plan in place.

April/May had lots of 'good intention' calls for wildland fires. These usually are found to be controlled burns by private citizens or the forest service. Heavy equipment diesel exhaust, dust rising from well drilling equipment, and cloud formations, known as water dogs, are other common causes of 'good intention' calls thought to be fires.

Fall brought early cold weather that had people firing up their wood stoves and fireplaces. In November we had the first chimney fire of the season. We were able to contain the fire that had broken through the mortar of an old brick chimney in several places in the house walls. Remember to have your chimney cleaned and inspected regularly.



An incident on 6 June resulted in our first drone mission and it was a success! The District was deployed for a report of intermittent smoke in the area of Twisp-Carlton Road. E633 was dispatched but was unable to locate any signs of a fire. One of our firefighter drone pilots was training with a District drone



in Carlton. He was met by a second District drone pilot on the Twisp-Carlton Road and together they launched the District drone (UAS-62). Within 3 minutes, using both the IR (infrared) and video cameras, they located a small burn pile and identified a route to the location which was in a heavily wooded area down a long dirt driveway. The pilots were able to contact the homeowner who was unaware that a burn ban was in effect. The small fire was well under control and the homeowner immediately agreed to extinguish it.

In September District 6 firefighters were called upon to assist AeroMethow and the Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue Team at a plane crash site. The plane had crashed on a mountain peak near Wenner Lake. District firefighters were transported, along with their extrication equipment, to the remote site in a UTV. The rescuers assisted the Coroner with the removal of the deceased pilot from the plane.

The District responded to two 'Mutual Aid' calls. In June we sent a brush truck (B651) and a tender (T641) to assist the Okanogan Fire Department with mop-up operations at the Spring Coulee wildland fire. The units were at the location for approximately 8 hours. Then on July 29, the District provided a Command Unit (602), an interface engine (E641) and a tender (T641) to assist in initial attack at the Eagle Bluff fire near Oroville. The units were on scene for approximately 12 hours. This incident was eventually declared a State Mobilization type incident.



It was a busy year, but the year ended peacefully without any significant incidents.

Operations

A 'Station Shift Program' was implemented at the Winthrop Station to provide a prompt incident response during weekends. Three volunteer firefighters sign up to man the station from 0800 to 1800. This provides sufficient staffing for the 'first due' engine to respond and has the engine departing the station within 2 minutes of an incident call. The program is in its early stages of implementation and is currently limited by the availability of volunteers to work on weekends.



The District works to supplement its operating budget by submitting grant requests to various agencies, including DNR, FEMA and Okanogan County Office of Emergency Management. This year we were awarded over \$26K in grants. Items purchased included pagers and handheld radios.



Every SCBA (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus) qualified firefighter must take an annual test to assure that their SCBA mask provides an airtight seal on their face. This year, using grant funds, the District received an automated test unit. This unit reduced the time and cost of conducting the testing and automatically produces test reports for each firefighter. The test assures firefighters that their mask will provide an air/smoke tight seal while they are performing firefighting activities in IDLH (Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health) environments.

The Washington Survey and Rating Bureau (WSRB) conducted its survey of the District in March. WSRB conducts an assessment about every five years to determine the fire 'protection class grading' of communities and the 'protection class rating' of individual properties. WSRB surveys over 650 communities throughout Washington State. Their findings are used by insurance companies to help determine fire insurance premiums. The WSRB representative does an on-site inspection of District records as well as facilities and equipment.



Among the items they evaluate are the fire station facilities, apparatus, equipment, training facilities, the number of personnel and their training records, the water supply system for firefighting, and the emergency communication system. The results of the last survey conducted in 2018 were a classification rating of six for the Towns of Winthrop and Twisp and a rating of eight for District areas within 5 road miles of a station, but not in the vicinity of a hydrant or approved water supply system. These ratings are unchanged from the previous survey. Ratings range from one to ten, with 1 being the best. Results of the survey also help the Fire Commissioners and staff in planning future facilities and capabilities of the District. Results of this year's survey are expected in the second quarter of 2024.

Training

OCFD6 maintains a year-round training program to ensure that our firefighters are ready to respond to your needs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Our team takes great pride in being ready to handle any issue you call us for, with technical competence and empathy. District firefighters recorded over 7,315 training hours in 2023.



The new Winthrop Station facility, Fire Training Structure (FTS), and training grounds provide our firefighters with the opportunity for year-round training in all aspects of the standards defined by the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) and State Regulations, including live fire training. Also, the paved area at the Winthrop Station provides the ability to conduct year-round apparatus driver training and multi-engine on-scene operations training.

In addition to the regular Thursday night training the District conducts Recruit Training, Firefighter I Training, Wildland Fire Fighter Training, SCBA Competence Training, Emergency Vehicle Incident Prevention Driver Training, and hosts specialty training courses.



Seven volunteers completed recruit training on 11 March, adding to the ranks of the Carlton, Twisp and Winthrop Stations. The course included over 50 hours of classroom and field exercises. Thanks to our veteran firefighters for assisting with the training and donating over 192 hours of their collective time. The Recruits will attend Firefighter I training and certification in March of 2024. This training prepares our firefighters for Washington State firefighter certification testout.

At years end we had 4 new Recruits that attended the District Orientation Class and are scheduled to attend Recruit School in the 1st quarter of 2024. This training provides new volunteer firefighters with the knowledge and skills needed to operate at emergency incidents safely and effectively.

All of our volunteers and staff are trained and nationally certified, at a minimum, as wildland Fire Fighter Type I (FFT I). Seven Recruits attended the 'Red Card' classroom and field training course and graduated in June.



The District conducted a four week 'SCBA Competence' training course in September. Seven firefighters participated in learning skills to survive mishaps, such as breathing equipment failures and structure collapse while operating in the interior of buildings. They are awarded their own SCBA face mask and are District certified for interior fire attack operations.



In October the District organized and hosted 'Fire Training Instructor I' course, which included three District firefighters and six firefighters from throughout the North Central Washington area. The firefighters earned their 'Washington State Firefighter Instructor I' certificate and now are qualified to help us train District firefighters. A typical skills training event takes 2 to 6 certified instructors to conduct.



Personnel

Volunteer firefighter recruiting and retention is a challenge in the Methow Valley and continues to be a critical need to provide adequate incident response staffing each day. Volunteering consumes a considerable amount of time and places new pressures on a person's physical and mental wellbeing, not to mention the need to coordinate family life and work life with volunteering activities. The average time of service of a volunteer in the District continues to be around 5 years.

The availability of volunteers is driven by many factors. The lack of affordable housing, lack of full-time employment, and an aging volunteer workforce are significant contributors to maintaining a reliable incident response workforce. The overall average number of personnel responding to incidents in 2023 was 5. Structure fires and wildland fires typically have the most responders.





Nationally the number of volunteer firefighters continues to decline, according to information released by the National Volunteer Fire Council.

At year's end the District firefighting staffing consisted of five paid firefighters and 48 volunteer firefighters. Based on Washington State Rating Bureau guidelines for a volunteer department the District would be considered fully staffed with a complement of 72 firefighters in the District. Our goal is to have 20 volunteers assigned to each of our four stations.

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact us at 509-997-2981 or drop by one of our stations on Thursday evening at 6:30 pm to meet our firefighters, see how we train, and learn more about volunteering as a firefighter with the District.



Our District family continues to grow. This year we hired a paid staff Captain and recruited 10 new volunteers. We work together and support each other as individuals and as an extended family.



Captain David Dodge joined the District staff in September. He comes to us with over 30 years of firefighter experience, including an extensive background in training firefighters. Captain Dodge is responsible for our 'Recruit and Vocational Training Program.' The District is fortunate to have an experienced firefighter like Captain Dodge.



Captain Dodge joins veteran firefighters Captain Keith Comstock and Captain Jeremiah Fosness as part of the District's paid command staff. Captain Comstock leads the 'Fire Prevention Program' and Captain Fosness is in charge of the 'Firefighter Training Program.'



Public Outreach, Fire Safety Education and Fire Prevention

Education is an integral part of having a safe and Firewise community. The primary objective of these programs is to reduce fire and life safety risk incidents through public awareness, preparation, prevention, and mitigation. Studies have shown that through public awareness and education communities can reduce fire loss, improve personal safety habits, and improve fire and life safety awareness. Our staff and firefighters participate year-round in programs throughout the Methow Valley.

The District supports and takes part in activities such as 'Fire Adapted Methow Valley' to increase wildfire awareness and preparedness within our community. In addition to participating in planning and discussion groups our firefighters volunteer at fuel reduction projects throughout the Valley.

Firefighters provided a fire education and safety booth at the 4th of July 'Arts Fest' event in Twisp. Kids and adults practiced hose handling, tried on structure gear, and were taught how to properly put out a fire with a fire extinguisher.



In March, six district firefighters journeyed to Seattle and participated in the Annual Firefighter StairClimb, the world's largest on-air SCBA stair climb competition. Our firefighters put in months of physical conditioning to be ready to climb the 69 floors, 1356 steps, to the top of the Seattle Columbia Tower. The OCFD6 team raised \$24,522, placing the our team 18th out of the 287 teams in the competition. 100% of the funds raised are contributed to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society to help find a cure for blood cancer.



District 6 was honored to receive a \$1200 grant from the Association of Washington Business (AWB) as part of their 'Holiday Kid's Tree Project.' The project selects rural fire districts throughout the State to



receive funds and a bag of toys to use in helping families in their District have a joyous holiday season. In addition to the toys provided by AWB each of our firefighters donated new toys as part of the project. The District firefighters partnered with Room One Client Advocates to distribute over 100 toys and \$1200 in gift cards for Hank's Harvest Foods and Ulrich's Pharmacy to families in the District.

Other community service events included providing volunteer labor for the Pearrygin Lake Kid's Bike Safety Rodeo, providing fire protection and equipment displays at the Twisp Airport Fly-In, having kids visit with firefighters and engines at the Halloween Trunk or Treat event, escorting LBHS Seniors at the graduation parade, delivering Santa for 'Christmas at the End of the Road', as well as participating in the Winthrop 49'ers Days parade and Twisp 4th of July parade, always a crowd pleasing appearance.



The public is always welcome to visit and tour the District fire stations. Please call (509-997-2981) to arrange individual or group visits or drop by when you're in the neighborhood. All are welcome to visit.



The above events are a sampling of activities we are involved in each year. In addition, as part of our public outreach program, the District maintains a District website, has a Facebook page, and publishes a quarterly newsletter, all aimed at keeping the public informed about District activities and ways you can help make your life and the community safer.

Fire Board of Commissioners

OCCFD6 is a junior taxing district within Okanogan County. The OCCFD6 district is governed by a Fire Board of Commissioners, consisting of 3 Commissioners, each elected by the voters in the District for 6-year terms. The Commissioners must be residents of the District. The Commissioners meet the second Monday of each month to conduct the business aspects of the District. These meetings are open to the



public, and the meeting agenda and minutes are posted on the District website.

Each year the Chief submits an operating budget to the Board for review, comment, and approval. The budget is reviewed at the monthly meetings. As part of the budget plan the District Chief submits a 'Capital Improvements/Operations Plan' and an 'Equipment Replacement Plan' for review and approval by the Board. These plans are available on the District website.

A major accomplishment of the Board this year included the finalization of the agreement with the Town of Twisp for the annexation of the Town into the Fire District. The annexation was approved by the Town voters and the District voters through the Okanogan County special election in August. The annexation will take effect in January 2025.

The Board approved a one-year extension of the current contract to provide 'Fire Protection Services' to the Town of Twisp. The contract is for \$65K. The District has provided these services to Twisp for the past 11 years.

Also, the Board finalized, with the Twisp Town Council, the purchase of the Twisp Town Fire Hall and associated property. Under a separate agreement the District agreed to provide fire services for Town owned buildings and property for the next 15 years. In exchange the Town transferred ownership of the Town owned Type 1 fire engine to the District.

District 6 has an active program applying for grant funding to relieve pressure on the annual budget. As a result of proposals submitted in 2022 as part of the 'American Rescue Plan Act' (ARPA), a Federally funded program to help organizations recover from economic issues caused by the Covid pandemic, the District has received funding in the amount of \$251K to cover cost increases incurred in the building of the new Winthrop Station. ARPA funds in the amount of \$75K were also awarded to the District to help fund the new fire hydrant in Mazama. The District applied for and received a grant for \$26K as part of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Phase II program. The funds were used to upgrade pagers and portable radios for the firefighters.



Commissioner Jerry Palm announced his plan to retire effective 1 January 2024. He provided 30 years of dedicated service as a Commissioner, including eight years as the Board Chairman. Thank you, Commissioner Palm, for the experience and guidance you provided to the benefit of the District and Community

During the Okanogan County November General election, John Lindsey was elected as Fire Commissioner to fill Board Position 3, vacated by Palm's retirement. Lindsey's

position takes effect 1 January 2024. John also serves as a volunteer firefighter with the District. Thank you, John Lindsey, for stepping up to run for the Fire Commissioner position and your service as a volunteer firefighter.



The District's financial position is good and there is a strategic plan in place to deal with operations, facilities, equipment maintenance and replacement, and improvements. There is a reserve fund in place to manage contingencies as they arise.

The Fire Board of Commissioners, Staff, and Firefighters of District 6 extend their heartfelt thanks to all of you for your support.

Okanogan County Fire District 6 maintains a professional crew of career and volunteer firefighters. They are well trained and dedicated to serving you. The District had a busy, yet safe, emergency response year in 2023.

