

Learn About Your Local Fire Service

In New York State (NYS), fire services are highly localized. The only way to determine what services are available in your area is to contact the specific fire department or company. You can call your local Fire Chief and ask the following questions to help you better understand your local fire service:

Does our local fire department have career or volunteer firefighters?

Career

Career fire departments employ full-time, paid firefighters who have gone through a standardized basic training academy. The training is based on standards established by the Office of Fire Prevention and Control. Subsequent and specialized training varies from agency to agency and member to member. Approximately 17,500 career firefighters serve in NY.

Volunteer

Volunteer fire departments utilize firefighters who do not receive payment for their services. More than 95,000 volunteer firefighters serve New York State residents. “Volunteer” in no way implies inferior, just not paid. Like career firefighters, volunteer firefighters also take courses and participate in training from OFPC standardized curriculum and other sources. The level of training required, as with career firefighters, is determined by the local jurisdiction; therefore, training levels vary from agency to agency and member to member. Unlike career firefighters, volunteer firefighters attend training and respond to emergencies on their own time and are unpaid.

Paid/on-call

In addition to career and volunteer firefighters, some fire departments use volunteers who do receive payment when they respond to emergencies and some departments have a combination of paid and volunteer members. About 350 firefighters are listed as “paid/on-call.”

How is the cause of residential fires determined?

Across NYS, the local Fire Chief has the responsibility to determine the cause of every fire and explosion in his/her jurisdiction. Local fire departments are responsible for completing New York State Fire Reporting System incident forms on each fire that occurs in their jurisdiction. These reports include information on the location, date and time of the fire; action taken at the scene; cause of the fire ignition, contributing factors, and human factors; injuries and deaths to civilians; injuries and deaths of fire service workers, and presence of functioning smoke detectors.

What services does the local fire department provide to the community?

All local fire departments perform basic fire suppression and determine the cause of fires. In addition to these functions, fire departments across NYS offer a range of services, including those listed below. Your local fire department can clarify which of the following services it offers:

- Emergency Medical Services (EMS): first responders, transport agency, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), critical care technicians, and paramedics
- Rescue activities (e.g., water, ice, confined space, remote area, vehicle rescue, etc.)
- Home safety inspections
- Educational events and presentations in the community and schools (Note: The New York State Education Department mandates 45 minutes of fire safety education per month for all NYS public schools.)
- Apartment building inspections
- Hazardous material response
- Smoke alarm installation