

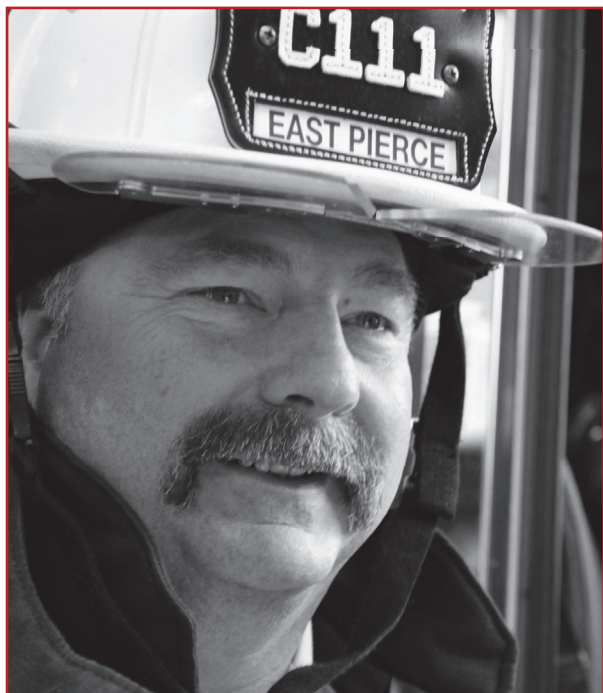


FIRE HOUSE NEWS

SERVING THE CITIZENS OF BONNEY LAKE, EDGEWOOD, MILTON, LAKE TAPPS, THE RIDGE COMMUNITIES, SOUTH PRAIRIE, SUMNER, TEHALEH AND SURROUNDING AREAS



Winter 2021



FROM THE CHIEF *Bud Backer*

Happy New Year! I hope that this newsletter finds you and your family well. The last year has been difficult and we hope that better times will be here soon.

The arrival of 2021 means I am nearing the completion of my sixth year here at East Pierce

Fire & Rescue, and a total of 36 years in the fire service dating back to 1985 when I first became a volunteer firefighter in Benton County. That time as a volunteer, along with my fire protection engineering background, catapulted me into a career that I had not anticipated coming out of college. It is a career that I am extremely honored and grateful to have experienced. While there have been highs and lows, I would not trade it for anything. Being a firefighter is the best job in the world!

While I am proud of the accomplishments that we have made here at East Pierce Fire & Rescue, the time has come for me to step aside and allow others to steer the ship. I will retire in the middle of June and enter the next chapter of life. One that my wife, Judy, is excited to get started. Our 30th wedding anniversary will be just a few months following my retirement, and finally, she will not have to share me anymore. After all the support that she has provided to me, it is time to spend more time together.

East Pierce Fire & Rescue is extremely fortunate to have talented and highly skilled people within our department that are ready to take on the leadership of the organization. The Board of Fire Commissioners has selected our very own Deputy Chief Jon Parkinson to be the next

Fire Chief!

The ability to select the next Fire Chief from within the organization helps provide a smooth transition and eliminates the chaos (and cost) of conducting a national search to fill the position.

I have known Chief Parkinson for some time and am supremely confident that he will serve you well. With 28 years of fire service experience, Jon has risen through the ranks and held the position of Deputy Chief in two departments. Having completed a master's degree in public administration, Chief Parkinson is well qualified for the position. You will be in good hands.

We will begin the leadership transition in the middle of May. Until then, I

have plenty to do around here. ■



Deputy Chief Jon Parkinson selected as next Fire Chief by Board of Fire Commissioners.

OPERATION
warm
more than a coat®

Firefighters Deliver Coats 4 Kids

Early last month, East Pierce firefighters and administrative staff teamed up to deliver just over 300 free coats to children in 16 elementary schools throughout the fire district as part of the East Pierce Firefighters C4K (coats for kids) program.

EPFR firefighters typically visit each school to custom fit the kiddos. However, COVID-19 safety precautions required a different strategy. Based on each school's pre-order, off-duty members bagged and delivered the coats to schools for staff to distribute.

Although our firefighters certainly prefer engaging with the children in person, the end goal is the same: ensuring children in our community are staying warm with a new coat this winter season.

"We are often asked if gently used coats can be donated to the program," says East Pierce Lieutenant and C4K Program Manager Troy Sterrenburg. "Only new coats are purchased in partnership with the Coats for Kids Foundation. To make this possible, firefighters accept corporate and individual monetary donations throughout the year."

If you would like to help, please visit www.operationwarm.org/eastpierce. ■



Firefighters distributed over 300 free coats to children in 16 local elementary schools.



COVID-19 STRIKES EPFR

In our last newsletter we discussed how well our safety measures had protected our department from COVID-19.

Unfortunately, community spread caught up to us in November. Two of our members were exposed while off-duty and unknowingly brought the virus to work resulting in the exposure of other members of our department.

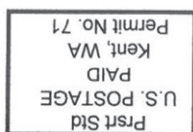
Ultimately seven members tested positive for COVID-19 which required a total of 30 firefighters to be either quarantined or isolated.

One member tested positive after being exposed by a patient that we treated and transported. That firefighter was briefly hospitalized with severe symptoms.

The 30 members unavailable to report to duty represented twenty-five percent of our response staffing. The remaining firefighters rallied to fill overtime slots to backfill those that were quarantined or isolated. Maintaining response capabilities was challenging.

Everyone has since recovered and staffing is back to normal. You can be certain that when we deliver service to those in need, strict safety protocols are followed to protect both patients and our members - as has always been our practice during this pandemic. Additionally, we have increased masking requirements within our fire stations to reduce the chance of a similar event from reoccurring.

Please help limit the spread. Wear a mask to protect others, maintain social distancing, and wash your hands often. ■



Bond Update

Status of Fire Engines, Fire Stations

East Pierce Fire & Rescue has taken delivery of our first two fire engines which will be placed in service any day now. These fire engines will be assigned to Station 111 in Bonney Lake and Station 112 in Prairie Ridge. Four additional fire engines remain on order with two set to arrive in March and the last two in September.

The ladder truck has arrived and is currently being upfitted with the technical and operational equipment required for emergency response. A rigorous training program will be conducted to ensure our firefighters are equipped with the knowledge and skill to drive this type of vehicle safely and effi-

ciently. The process will take several months to appropriately train up to 21 firefighters on its operation. Eventually, the ladder truck will be assigned to Station 113 in Sumner.

The demolition of Station 118 in Edgewood should begin soon. The crews normally stationed in Edgewood will be temporarily relocated to accommodations in Milton during construction. Originally, the intent was to continue operations from the existing station during construction, but design require-



Following upfitting and personnel training, the new ladder truck will be assigned to Station 113 in Sumner.

ments necessitated the adjustment.

The engine company will move into the Milton fire station, while the medic unit will be housed at the Milton Community Center. Space limitations at the Milton fire station require that the crew be split.



EPFR's two newest fire engines will be assigned to Stations 111 and 112 in Bonney Lake and Prairie Ridge.

The groundbreaking of Station 111 in Bonney is slated for late this summer or early fall. ■

Other Station Project Updates

Station 112—Prairie Ridge

Working to acquire land for a new fire station location.

Station 114—Northwest Lake Tapps

Land has been acquired to expand the existing footprint at the current location.

Station 117—Tehaleh

Slated to be the last of the Phase I station projects as call volume remains low in this area.

Station 124—Milton

Land has been acquired for a new fire station. This Phase II project is slated for 2025 or later.

HEALTH WATCH

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

Things You Need To Know...And Things We Don't Know Yet

Over 300,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 complications, almost one in every 1,000 people in the United States. Infection control experts believe that the next few months will be grim, with many more people dying from the coronavirus.

However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. New COVID-19 vaccines are being released that could help end the large-scale impact of the pandemic and reduce the toll of COVID-19 deaths.

Two companies, Pfizer and Moderna, recently completed large-scale clinical COVID-19 vaccine trials and submitted for Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) through the Food and Drug Administration, CDC and independent vaccine review committees. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were approved by the FDA in December.

Vaccination of high-risk healthcare workers, first responders and patients living in long-term care facilities (i.e., nursing homes and assisted living centers) has already begun in Washington State. Over the next few months, hundreds of thousands of people at high-risk from COVID-19 and essential workers will start getting vaccinated.

The information in this article is intended to provide background

information for people who want to know more about the vaccines. We understand that many people may have questions about the vaccines, including their effectiveness and safety. The information in this briefing sheet was compiled by EPFR's Infection Control Officers and includes our best understanding of the vaccines. In the end, however, each individual needs to make their own decision about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

? Normally it takes years to develop vaccines. How were these vaccines able to be developed so quickly?

The record-breaking speed for the development of the Covid-19 vaccines is attributed to several factors. Technological advances in DNA and mRNA coding allowed for scientist to quickly identify the DNA sequence of the virus. The federal government's "Operation Warp Speed" provided funding not typically available for drug manufacturers for the development of the vaccine. Moderna used the funds provided by "Operation Warp Speed" to fund their research and development. Pfizer, on the other hand, did not receive up front funding, but signed contracts with the federal government to purchase 100 million doses if they produced an approved vaccine.

Pfizer and Moderna were able to quickly develop coronavirus vaccines by using a new type of "mRNA-based" (messenger-RNA) vaccine. Instead of building a vaccine by using a dead or inactivated COVID-19 virus, the mRNA vaccine uses genetic sequences to train your body to make a "spike" protein normally found on the surface of the COVID-19 virus. Cells at the injection site make copies of this spike protein before the mRNA material is broken down. Your body recognizes that the spike proteins are not supposed to be there. This triggers an immune response in your body, developing different types of antibodies which destroy the spike proteins. These different antibodies are then ready to protect you from an actual COVID-19 infection in the future.

Scientists describe the process of using mRNA as similar to

"software coding" which can be done in a matter of weeks in the laboratory. This gave Pfizer and Moderna a big head-start over other traditional vaccines, which take

more time, and need to incorporate fragments of dead or inactivated COVID-19 virus, to help trigger an immune response.

Nearly 44,000 people were included in the Pfizer study, and more than 34,000 were enrolled in the Moderna study, both of which started enrolling volunteers last summer. In each study, half of the volunteers received the vaccine and half received a placebo (i.e., saline solution). As is standard for clinical trials, the data was "double-blinded" so none of the volunteers, doctors, coordinators knew which volunteers received the vaccine vs. a placebo. Only the independent review boards which received the data at the end of the study had this information, allowing them to assess how effective the vaccine was in people versus the control group which received the placebo. These numbers were then used to project the effectiveness of the vaccines.

In addition to the FDA, two independent vaccine development committees and a Western States Vaccine Review Committee are reviewing the vaccines before they are approved for use in Washington.

See COVID-19 VACCINATIONS, page 4



More To Accomplish

Bringing our engine company staffing to safe levels has been a priority. The need has been to increase staffing of our engine companies and ladder truck from two to three firefighters 24/7/365 on each unit.

In 2020, we reached that goal on four of the six units. Realistically, we currently have three firefighters on most units when additional staffing allows. But on July 1, 2021 we will achieve a staffing level of three firefighters on all six units (five engines and one ladder) every day!

Reaching this goal is the result of a great deal of hard work, which

would not have been accomplished without the support of the public approving the funding measures.

Having three firefighters on each engine means that when one of those units arrive on scene of a working fire with a needed rescue, they have enough firefighters on board to enter the structure and conduct the rescue in compliance with State law. A unit arriving with only two firefighters requires them to wait for an additional unit to arrive on scene, losing critical time in the rescue effort.

As we prepare to expand the number of fire stations in our system, we will also look to hire additional

firefighters in preparation for adding fire stations in the Tehaleh and Milton areas. We must continue bringing new firefighters on board to maintain safe staffing levels and to replace those senior members that will be retiring.

To accomplish this our tax revenues must be near the authorized total limit of \$2.00 per \$1,000 of assessed value. We must renew the EMS levy in 2021 or lose twenty-five percent of our tax revenue as that levy expires at the end of this year. At the same time, we will ask voters to

consider resetting the cap to the statutory limit for our regular fire levy. Neither will be a new tax, just a reauthorization of our current levies. EPFR will still be the most cost-effective career fire department in the county as we do not collect an additional Maintenance & Operations Levy as other departments do.

More information will be shared later in the year as the ballot measures will most likely be presented as part of the August Primary Election. ■



EPFR Receives Sanitizing Equipment

East Pierce Fire & Rescue is one of 30 emergency response agencies that received sanitization equipment from Pierce County Emergency Management to help get ambulances back in service more efficiently after a call.

Each time an ambulance transports a patient, Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians sanitize the medical equipment and patient area of the rigs.

Pierce County Emergency Management used CARES Act Funding to purchase over 200 UVC lamps, 70 mask sanitizers, 70 foggers, and 500 gallons of disinfecting solution for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies in Pierce County. This equipment will sanitize ambulances and masks to CDC guidelines and keep EMS personnel and their patients safer against COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

East Pierce received eight foggers and 56 gallons of disinfecting solution. Eight portable UVC lamps are expected soon. ■

Foggers and UVC lamps utilized to sanitize equipment/stations.



Portable Generators = CO Poisoning Risk

Winter in the Northwest and power outages often go hand-in-hand, which prompt the use of alternative power sources...such as generators. Although generators help provide a welcome comfort during extreme conditions, they pose a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide, also known as CO, is called the “Invisible Killer” because it’s a colorless, odorless, poisonous gas. More than 150 people in the United States die every year from accidental non-fire related CO poisoning associated with consumer products, including generators. Other sources that can produce carbon monoxide include faulty, improperly-used or incorrectly-vented fuel-burning appliances - such as furnaces, stoves, water heaters and fireplaces.

To protect your family from CO poisoning, East

Pierce Fire & Rescue urges residents to always use generators outdoors, at least 20 feet away from doors, windows and vents. NEVER use generators in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces, or other enclosed or partially enclosed areas, even with ventilation.

Install and maintain CO alarms inside your home to provide early warning of carbon monoxide. Choose a CO alarm that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory. Carbon monoxide alarms are not substitutes for smoke alarms. Know the difference between the sound of a smoke alarm and the sound of a CO alarm.

Visit for www.eastpiercefirer.org for more CO safety tips and information on Washington’s carbon monoxide safety law. ■



SMOKE ALARMS YOUR NOSE AT NIGHT

Smoke alarms are a key part of a home fire escape plan. When there is a fire, smoke spreads fast. Working smoke alarms give you early warning so you can get outside quickly.

Safety Tips

- ✓ Install smoke alarms in every bedroom. They should also be outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home.
- ✓ It is best to use interconnected smoke alarms. When one sounds, they all sound.
- ✓ Test all smoke alarms at least once a month. Press the test button to be sure the alarm is working.
- ✓ Current alarms on the market employ different types of technology including multi-sensing, which could include smoke and carbon monoxide combined.
- ✓ A smoke alarm should be on the ceiling or high on the wall. Keep smoke alarms away from the kitchen to reduce false alarms. They should be at least 10 feet from the stove.
- ✓ People who are hard of hearing or deaf can use special alarms. These alarms have strobe lights and bed shakers.
- ✓ Replace all smoke alarms when they are 10 years old.



Did You Know...

- ? A closed door may slow the spread of smoke, heat and fire?
- ? Roughly 3 out of 5 deaths happen in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms?

Who is East Pierce Fire & Rescue?

East Pierce Fire & Rescue was founded on a strong commitment to customer service. The department's *Mission, Vision and Values* guide the actions of the department and its employees. Exceptional customer service and a concern for the employees and their families have become hallmarks of our culture.

EPFR was created when the City of Bonney Lake Fire Department, Pierce County Fire District 22/Lake Tapps Fire and Pierce County Fire District 24 merged in 2000 with the goal of providing a seamless response to emergency situations.

Since then, the following mergers or annexations into EPFR have occurred:

- 2006: Pierce County Fire District 12 and South Prairie/Fire District 20
- 2008: Sumner/Fire District 1
- 2010: Edgewood/Fire District 8
- 2013: Milton Fire Department

Today, East Pierce serves a population of approximately 97,000 residents living in and around Bonney Lake, Sumner, Lake Tapps, the Ridge Communities, South Prairie, Tehaleh, Edgewood and Milton. The district covers approximately 153 square miles and protects residents from 9 stations—six staffed and two volunteer, and one facility on Lake Tapps for the marine rescue unit.

All full-time firefighters are cross-trained as either emergency medical technicians (EMTs) or paramedics and can respond to both medical emergencies and fires.

An independently-elected board of commissioners govern the agency. ■

Commissioners

- Dale Mitchell, Chair
- Jon Napier, Vice Chair
- Mike Cathey
- Ed Egan
- Kevin Garling
- Randy Kroum
- Pat McElligott

Staffed Stations

- Station 111 - Bonney Lake**
Headquarters Station
18421 Veterans Memorial Dr. E.
(253) 863-1800
- Station 112 - Prairie Ridge**
12006 214th Ave. E.
- Station 113 - Sumner**
800 Harrison St.
- Station 114 - Lake Tapps**
3206 W. Tapps Dr. E.
- Station 116 - Foothills**
10515 234th Ave. E.
- Station 118 - Edgewood**
10105 24th St. E.

Volunteer Station

- Station 119 - South Prairie**
350 State Route 162

COVID-19 Vaccinations, continued from page 2

How effective are the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines against COVID-19?

These first two vaccines are exceptionally effective against the coronavirus. Clinical studies indicate the Pfizer vaccine was 95% effective in preventing COVID-19 illness. The Moderna vaccine was 94.5% effective in preventing the virus, and 100% effective in preventing serious illness caused by COVID-19. By comparison, vaccines for other respiratory illnesses, such as influenza, are generally no more than 60% effective.

To receive effective protection from COVID-19, both vaccines require people to get a second vaccination dose from the same manufacturer a few weeks later.

Are these new Pfizer and Moderna vaccines my only choice for protection from COVID-19?

Several other vaccines may gain approval for use in the first few months of 2021. Companies like Johnson & Johnson, and AstraZeneca (working with Oxford University) have vaccines going through large scale clinical trials. If they are proven effective, they could receive Emergency Use Authorization approval and be released in the first part of 2021. However, we do not have any information on the level of protection they provide or their safety profile.

If I have already had COVID-19 should I still get vaccinated?

Yes. People who have had COVID-19 are still advised to get vaccinated because it is unclear how long their immunity from the initial illness will last. The vaccines appear to develop a stronger, potentially longer-lasting immune response than the immune response many people have developed after getting ill from the coronavirus.

It will vary from person to person, based upon their immune systems and the severity of the initial illness. Most scientists believe that “sicker” patients who survive will have longer lasting immunity than those who had a minor or illness without symptoms. Although rare, some people have become sick a second time with COVID-19 and at least one patient has died from a second COVID-19 illness. Vaccination is not recommended for anyone who has tested positive for Covid-19 in the 90 days prior to vaccination.



Are the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines safe? Are there side effects?

So far, the vaccines appear to be safe, with no serious adverse reactions reported. In prior vaccine studies, when serious side effects occurred, 90% of the time they happened in the first two months after the vaccination. Study participants have been tracked for more than three months. So far, NO adverse effects have been found.

(Of note, these volunteers will be tracked for two years to monitor their health.)

People with severe allergies (those who should carry an Epi-Pen with them) should consult with their physician on whether to get the vaccine.

There are relatively minor side-effects, which appear to be comparable to the flu vaccine, in both the numbers of people reporting side-effects and in the type of complaint. The most common complaints included: injection site pain, fatigue, body aches and fever. These side-effects generally went away within 24 hours.

Most of the side-effects occurred after the second vaccination dose, which prompts the body to start generating an immune response (development of antibodies, T-cells, etc.) to deal with a future COVID-19 exposure. The body's immune response appears to be what causes the side-effects in some people. But you are NOT experiencing any sort of COVID-19 illness.

Once you get vaccinated, can you still get sick? Can you still transmit the virus to other people?

Yes...you could still get sick since the effectiveness of the vaccines are calculated at approximately 95%.

We do not know—yet—if you can still infect other people. The vaccine keeps YOU from getting sick, however the virus can still latch onto receptor sites in your nose, throat, and respiratory system. Theoretically, you could still be a “carrier”, even if you have no symptoms, and might still be able to infect other people. The clinical vaccine trials were not designed to evaluate the “asymptomatic carrier” issue. It could take months until we have more information on this subject.

How long will the COVID-19 vaccine provide immunity? Will we need annual boosters? What if the virus mutates?

How long will immunity from the

Pfizer and Moderna vaccines last? Six months? A year? Two years? We do not know. Future vaccines may require only a single shot and might provide even longer lasting protection. We might need to get annual COVID-19 vaccines, just like the flu. In fact, the flu vaccine might include an annual COVID-19 booster. There have been coronavirus mutations, but none impacting the effectiveness of the current COVID-19 vaccines.

What happens if I only get one dose of the COVID-19 vaccination?

This was not studied extensively in the clinical trials. Most people participating in the trials received both shots. However, infection control experts believe that patients skipping the second injection MIGHT receive some limited protection, perhaps enough to lessen the severity of the disease, but it is unclear. Both shots are needed for good protection from the coronavirus.

Will the vaccine be safe and effective for older patients?

Yes. Older patients were included in the clinical studies, and their immune response and protection from COVID-19 appears to be roughly equivalent to those in younger patients.

Will the vaccine be safe if you are pregnant?

The vaccines were not tested on patients who were pregnant, which is typical for vaccine development studies. However, independent infection control and vaccine development committees will soon release guidelines for persons who are pregnant, or who may be planning on becoming pregnant.

Can you get one dose from one vaccine and another from a different vaccine?

No. To generate an appropriate immune response, you should get both doses from the same vaccine. It is not clear what would happen if you get one shot with one vaccine, and a second shot from a different company.

Will I still need to wear a mask after getting vaccinated?

Yes. At least for now. As mentioned earlier, you might still be able to infect others. The vaccine manufacturers are studying this issue. We hope that they can answer this question in the near future. ■