

BENTON COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT #1

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Benton 1: Grants, partnerships and volunteers make tax dollars stretch further

KENNEWICK, WASH.— Since 2015, Benton County Fire District 1 has been awarded \$1.1 million in grants for training, equipment and supplies to provide emergency services locally or in partnership with other agencies in the region. Most recently, Benton 1 was part of a nine-agency partnership that received a \$517,350 regional grant for firefighter training.

“We look for ways to make local tax dollars stretch further,” said Fire Chief Lonnie Click. “It’s not a substitute for regular revenue, but it does help reduce costs for taxpayers in the long-run.”

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) awards large grants to emergency agencies, such as the \$426,420 Benton 1 received to replace 60 self-contained breathing apparatus firefighters use on the job. Benton 1 provided a 5% match to qualify for the grant.

State and local agencies, such as the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, the Washington State Department of Ecology, the Washington State Department of Health, as well as Franklin and Benton County Emergency Management, also help fund emergency services. These agencies awarded Benton 1 almost \$200,000 in grants for firefighter training, equipment and gear.

Area businesses also jump into the mix. Benton 1 has received a Walmart grant of \$2,500 and another from Agrium-Northwest for \$1,600 to purchase handheld thermal imaging devices to locate people during a fire.

“It takes a lot of coordination to effectively fund and deliver emergency services,” says Chief Click. “We want our taxpayers to know that we’re grateful, and also thank the people, agencies and businesses who partner with us to save lives and property every day.”

One of the most valuable savings for Benton 1 taxpayers are the volunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians. The agency is considered a “combination fire department” with approximately 90 volunteer, part-time and full-time firefighters and EMTs serving 17,800 people over 320 square miles in the communities of South Kennewick, Finley, Rancho Reata, Triple Vista, and Badger Canyon. Relying primarily on volunteers saves money on labor costs, which frees up revenue for firefighting apparatus and equipment.

Emergency services are funded with a fire levy of \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed value. Benton 1 is considering asking voters to approve a levy for Emergency Medical Service in 2018 to improve service to the community. Currently, 90 percent of all EMS calls received by Benton 1 require patient transport to area hospitals. The agency currently relies on mutual aid, which can take longer and drain resources of neighboring fire districts.

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Benton County Fire District 1 responds to an average of 1,300 calls per year for structural and wildland fire suppression, emergency medical service, technical rescue, and hazardous materials response. Emergency personnel also are active and involved in the community and local schools teaching fire and injury prevention. Benton 1 operates under a balanced budget, and has passed all financial and accountability audits with the state.