

BENTON COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT #1

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Benton 1: Sharing resources saves money and improves efficiencies for taxpayers

KENNEWICK, WASH.— Twelve volunteers for Benton County Fire District #1 begin their firefighter training this week at a facility jointly owned by the fire district and the City of Kennewick. Six fire agencies will participate in the training, which is expected to last through November. Fire Chief Lonnie Click says that this is one way that Benton 1 looks to share costs and improve efficiencies for taxpayers.

Thirty-four total participants could qualify as a Firefighter 1 based on standards established by the National Fire Protection Association. Prior to training, all volunteers have passed written, medical and physical exams to qualify. In addition to recruit school, the facility, located in Kennewick, is in use six days a week for advanced firefighter training such as live fire, search and rescue, confined space and other technical fire ground operations.

“We all share the cost of the facility and required trainings,” said Chief Lonnie Click. “The end result is less cost to our taxpayers and highly trained emergency personnel for our communities.”

Benton 1 and neighboring agencies also partner on a rehabilitation unit that monitors firefighter health while at an incident. This type of apparatus, which can cost upwards of \$40,000.00 is important to provide heat, air conditioning, fluids, or medical attention that firefighters may need on scene.

The agencies share the cost of a Life Safety House to teach families fire exit drills and other safety issues. They maintain emergency equipment, and make bulk purchases of supplies together to get better rates. They also participate in the Southeast Washington Air Group to provide air support during fires in each jurisdiction, including equipment parts replacement and maintenance.

Another way Benton 1 reduces costs for taxpayers is by lending personnel and equipment during wildland fire season. This summer, Benton 1 crews participated in state incidents such as the Silver Dollar Fire in Richland, the Headwater Fire in Goldendale, and the East Saddle Fire in Othello. These resources are only provided after local emergency service levels are met, and can result in revenue of \$150,000-\$300,000 in reimbursement from state and federal agencies.

“This reimbursement revenue helps fund other things we need to improve emergency services locally,” said Chief Click. “It’s a win-win for our taxpayers. People and apparatus aren’t just sitting around waiting to go on a call; they’re working.”

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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.