

Saucon Valley Volunteer Fire Companies Exploring Merger



For the past year, the five (5) volunteer fire companies that serve Hellertown Borough and Lower Saucon Township have been exploring the idea of pooling resources and merging the companies into one regional fire company to gain economies and further improve their collective response to fire calls.

The Chief Officers from Dewey Volunteer Fire Company in Hellertown and Se-Wy-Co Volunteer Fire Company, Leithsville Volunteer Fire Company, Southeastern Volunteer Fire Company and Steel City Volunteer Fire Company in the Township feel that by combining their resources into a regional fire company, they will be better equipped to overcome the challenges facing volunteer fire companies.



Across the country, volunteer fire companies are faced with a continuing decline in volunteers and financial support. With the cost of new fire apparatus running over half a million dollars and protective clothing for each new fire fighter costing \$6,000 or more, fire companies can no longer get by on the proceeds from bingo and social hall rentals. The changing demographics, work habits, job locations, and personal living habits of residents, along with increased mandatory training standards and call volume, have all had a negative impact on the recruitment of volunteers and the retention of existing members.

To meet these challenges, the five fire companies, working with the Borough and Township Councils, have taken the following steps over the past several months:



- To address the need for firefighters to respond to fire calls during the 6:00 am – 6:00 pm period seven (7) days a week, the Councils instituted a policy whereby Borough and Township Public Works employees who are fire fighters are released to respond to fire calls during the workday. In addition, they directed that, whenever possible, all new Public Works employees should also be trained firefighters. This policy, in the space of two years, has increased by five (5) the number of available firefighters for daytime response.
- The fire companies have divided the Township and Borough into four (4) fire response zones with a structured response plan that ensures that only the needed equipment and personnel for the type of incident is dispatched on the call.
- The fire companies have implemented a "16 All Call" system which has been put into use during the 6:00 am to 6:00 pm time period where all members of each department are alerted for every incident and respond to nearest station, if available, depending on the incident location. This procedure has also increased the staffing on apparatus responding to fire calls.
- The fire companies have been conducting joint training at least twice every month for the past year. The fire companies have been cross-training on each other's fire equipment which will enable them to operate and be familiar with all of the fire apparatus in the Saucon Valley.
- Future acquisitions of fire apparatus will be done through one manufacturer so that equipment will be standardized for ease of training firefighters on the apparatus.
- The fire companies have completed an analysis of their current fire apparatus and will be selling or disposing of excess equipment not needed for the regional fire response.



The goal of these merger or consolidation talks is to produce a regional fire company that can effectively and efficiently serve the residents of the Saucon Valley. The fire companies foresee a consolidated fire service providing improvements such as: more efficient use of resources; improved services; reduced apparatus replacement requirements and costs; elimination of duplicative equipment needs, uniform training and operational guidelines and marked improvements in recruitment and retention of firefighters.



The men and women of our five fire companies who volunteer their time to protect our families, homes, and property seldom get the recognition they deserve for the job they do on our behalf. We all join in thanking them for their commitment to service and for exhibiting the kind of forward thinking needed to meet the challenges of firefighting in the 21st Century.