

# **Guidelines for Media at Emergency Incidents**



**EPHRATA FIRE DEPARTMENT**

REVISED JULY 2006

# Introduction

One of the first and most fundamental considerations of this nation's founders in drafting the Bill of Rights was to provide for a free press as an essential element of the First Amendment to the Constitution. They recognized that a well-informed citizenry is vital to the effective functioning of a democracy.

Ephrata Fire Department operations profoundly affect the public and therefore arouse substantial public interest. Likewise, public interest and public cooperation bear significantly on the successful accomplishment of our mission.

The Ephrata Fire Department will make every reasonable effort to serve the needs of the media in informing the public about fire and life safety issues, and other fire hazards. This will be done with an attitude of openness and frankness whenever possible.

The media will be told all that can be told *except*:

1. identities of juveniles involved in an incident,
2. identities of medical emergency patients or their protected healthcare information,  
or
3. information related to a criminal investigation.

Information will be given which will not impinge on these three areas. If asked to divulge this information, we will simply state that nothing more can be said.

In all other matters in our relationship with the media in dealing with current news, we will make every reasonable effort in providing the media representatives with full and accurate material.

We appreciate your assistance in broadcasting the activities of the Ephrata Fire Department and assisting us in preventing fires and injuries.

# Guidelines for Media at Emergency Incidents

As a member of the working media, you may travel to various emergency incidents to report the event.

The Ephrata Fire Department is an all hazard department, responding not only to fires, but also auto accidents, medical emergencies, hazardous materials releases and brush fires, for example.

To assist you in quickly gathering the information you need in a manner that will guard your safety, we request you follow the guidelines below.

1. You have access to the Ephrata Fire Department Public Information Officer. Should you have a question related to an emergency event in Ephrata, contact Public Information Officer, Battalion Chief Kyle Foreman, at 509-771-0875, or the Fire Station at 509-754-4666 Monday – Friday, 8am-5pm.
2. When driving to the scene of an emergency, please follow all traffic laws. Do not try to keep up with an emergency vehicle should one pass you.
3. When you arrive on the emergency scene, park your vehicle on the same side of the road as the emergency responders, at least a block away as to not interfere with incoming apparatus..
4. Dress for the conditions. Emergency scenes are usually wet, muddy or full of debris.
5. Report to the Command Post to locate the Public Information Officer (PIO). The Command Post is usually marked by a green strobe light or flag indicating “Command Post.” From here you will be directed to the media area and information officer. If you are unsure, ask any firefighter to assist you, or look for a firefighter with a white helmet, which indicates a command officer.
6. Understand that during an emergency incident, the primary objective is to save lives and protect property. Information will be relayed to the press as quickly as possible. Persons assigned to assist you understand the deadlines you work under and will provide information as it becomes available.
7. When you report to the media area and PIO, he/she will brief you as to dangers on the scene. In addition to emergency scenes being wet and muddy, they are also very dangerous. Walls can fall, power lines can come down and explosions may occur. You will not be restricted in your movements other than to keep you alive and uninjured.
8. Following the incident, should additional information become available, it will be forwarded to your newsroom.
9. After each significant incident, the EFD will post a news release on the City of Ephrata website at [www.ephrata.org](http://www.ephrata.org) .

# Media Relations Program

The information we can and will release differs depending upon the nature of the emergency.

## A. FIRE INCIDENTS

- Property owner or occupant names
- Address
- Cause of the fire
- Origin of the fire
- Dollar estimate of damage and contents saved
- Injuries
- Numbers of firefighters, fire equipment involved
- Special accomplishments, hazards
- Other information as requested

## B. NON-FIRE INCIDENTS

- Release of property owner, occupant or victims names, as allowed by law
- Address of incident
- Cause of accident, as allowed by law
- Injury report
- Hospital location where victims were transported
- Numbers of firefighters, fire equipment involved
- Special accomplishments, hazards
- Other information as requested

### By Washington State law, we cannot release the following information:

- Names of juveniles involved in an incident.
- Identities of medical emergency patients.
- Information related to a criminal incident or investigation.
- Generally, victim names are released by law enforcement agencies after the immediate family is notified.

The **Public Information Officer (PIO)** is charged with dissemination of information to the news media on the scene of an incident, as well as follow-up information that is not readily available on the scene (i.e. damage estimate, cause, etc.). This person is also available to augment existing communications and assist in contacting other Fire Protection Department personnel for media interviews.

The Fire Department enforces two policies pertaining to media relations that must be adhered to at all times:

1. With the exception of the chief officers, the only Fire Department personnel authorized to relay information to the news media, without prior approval, are the PIO or the Incident Commander (IC) of the emergency.
2. At any time during the course of an incident involving private property, if the property owner asks that media representatives leave the premises, Fire Department personnel will see that news media adhere to the property owner's request. In the event this occurs, Fire Department personnel will relay information to media outlets at a separate time and location.

# Ephrata Fire Department Fact Sheet

**Population Served:** 6,875

**Area Served:** 10.1 Square Miles

**Number of Alarms Annually:** 400 (average)

**Personnel:** 1 career Fire Chief, 40 volunteers, 1 Admin. Assistant

**Number of Apparatus:** 16

## Fire Station Location

**Station 21**  
800 A Street SE  
Ephrata, WA 98823-2200

## Helmet Color Code

The Ephrata Fire Department uses a helmet color code system for identification of personnel on the scene of an emergency. The system is as follows:

White Helmet – Chief, Assistant Chief, Battalion Chief

Red Helmet – Captain

Yellow Helmet – Firefighter

## Vehicle Number System

Each vehicle in the Department has an assigned number. The first number in the sequence represents the station where the apparatus is stationed. The next two numbers indicate the vehicle's use. Example:

2111 - Station 21 Engine; 2172 - Station 21 Command Unit.

2111, 2112, 2113 - Engine

2121, 2122, 2123, 2124, 2125 – Wildland Engine

2131 – Water Tender

2141 - Rescue Unit

2161, 2162, 2163 – Support/Utility Units

2171, 2172 – Command Units

2195 – Ladder Truck

### **Radio Identifiers:**

20-01 Fire Chief

20-02 Batt'n Chiefs

20-03

20-04

20-05 Captains

20-06

20-08 Safety Officer

20-09 Medical Officer

20-48 Chaplain

# Emergency Incidents

*Emergency incidents are usually categorized by the amount of equipment used. Equipment is dispatched according to the severity of the emergency.*

## **A. STILL ALARM**

An alarm called into the fire station rather than the 911 dispatch center.

## **B. FIRST ALARM**

A supply of engine companies and tankers supplemented by a ladder, a rescue squad and a chief. Usually two or three engines, one or two tankers, one ladder and one chief respond to a first or box alarm. This is the standard response, whether the structure is residential or commercial.

## **C. SECOND OR ADDITIONAL ALARMS**

An additional supply of engines, tenders and/or ladders to supplement equipment already involved in fire fighting operations. A general rule is that often the same numbers of units are sent on additional alarms as responded to the first alarm.

### **Alarm Types**

**RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE FIRE:** A fire in any single-family dwelling. Usual response includes: one engine, one ladder truck, one rescue unit, and mutual aid assistance from Fire District 13.

**COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE FIRE:** Any structure fire involving a multiple family dwelling or commercial business. Usual response to this incident includes: one engine, one ladder truck, one rescue unit and mutual aid assistance from Grant County FD 13.

**TECHNICAL RESCUE:** Any situation in which a life may be in danger (i.e. drowning, building collapse, climbing accident, etc.). Usual response includes: one engine, one rescue unit and one ambulance unit.

**ACCIDENT WITH EXTRICATION:** An automobile accident in which the occupants are trapped. Usual response includes: one ENGINE, one RESCUE UNIT.

**ACCIDENT WITH INJURIES:** A vehicle accident with injured persons. Usual response includes: one RESCUE and one ENGINE.

**MEDICAL EMERGENCY:** Any incident involving illness or trauma not related to a motor vehicle accident or rescue. Usual response includes: One RESCUE.

**INVESTIGATION:** Any incident in which actual emergency situation may be unknown, such as smoke in the area.

**ASSIST A CITIZEN:** Any incident in which a citizen needs assistance (i.e. water in the basement, person locked in car, etc.). Usual response includes: one ENGINE or one RESCUE, depending on the situation.

**OUTSIDE FIRE:** An incident involving burning grass, weeds or other natural ground cover. Response generally includes: 2 WILDLAND ENGINES, one WATER TENDER.

**VEHICLE FIRE:** An incident involving fire in a motor vehicle. Usual response includes one engine.

**HAZARDOUS MATERIALS INCIDENT:** An incident involving the uncontrolled release or spill of a designated hazardous material. This event may present risk to persons or the environment. Usual response includes: one engine, one support unit with hazmat equipment.

**MISCELLANEOUS INCIDENTS:** Include carbon monoxide detector soundings, gas odors outside, etc. Response generally includes one engine and the Duty Officer.

# Helicopter Operations

The Ephrata Fire Department occasionally uses helicopters in its emergency operations. The most frequently used aircraft is Northwest MedStar, the air medical helicopter based in the Tri-Cities and Spokane.

If a medical emergency warrants helicopter transport, the helicopter is requested by the Fire Department and responds. Firefighters on the scene locate and establish a landing zone and provide assistance to the helicopter and medical flight crew as needed.

Basic criteria for requesting the helicopter can include, but is not limited to:

- life threatening traumatic injury from an auto accident;
- life threatening illness such as cardiac arrest;
- distance from hospital.

**If you are on the scene of an emergency when the helicopter is arriving or departing please follow these safety guidelines.**

- Do not take flash photographs or shoot video using a floodlight. This can blind the pilot and flight crew at night.
- Hold onto personal belongings such as hats. The rotor wash can blow these off.
- Do not approach the helicopter unless told to do so by the pilot or flight crew.
- NEVER approach from the rear due to the danger of the tail rotor.
- Follow other directions of firefighters or flight crew.

## Ambulance Locations Serving Ephrata

*Services Provided by Grant County Fire Department 5 of Moses Lake*

Medic 54	Alder St. NW, Ephrata (Sta 5-14)
Medic 58	Patton Blvd., Moses Lake (Sta 5-8)
Medic 51	Nelson Rd., Moses Lake (Sta 5-1)

## Glossary

**AIR PACK, SCBA (Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus):** Respiratory protective mask and tank worn by firefighters that contain their own breathing air supply.

**AIRWAY:** A medical term referring to the passageway from the mouth/nose to the lungs of a patient. Also refers to the plastic devices used by medical personnel to keep this passage open.

**ALARM:** A notification to respond to an emergency.

**APPARATUS:** Any fire department vehicle.

**APPARATUS OPERATOR:** Engineer, driver, aerial ladder operator or anyone acting in any one of these positions.

**APPARATUS BAY:** The portion of a fire station on which fire trucks are parked.

**ARSON:** The willful and malicious burning of the property of another. Can also refer to the intentional burning on one's own property.

**ATTACK:** Any action to control a fire.

**AUDIBLE ALARM:** An alarm actuated by heat/smoke, flame-sensing devices or the water flow in a sprinkler system.

**BACKDRAFT:** An explosion of a hot, smoldering fire caused by a sudden inrush of oxygen into the previously smoldering fire.

**BATTALION:** A division within the fire department, usually containing a number of companies.

**BLEVE (Boiling Liquid Expanding Vapor Explosion):** Catastrophic explosion of pressurized vapors from pressurized tank such as propane or anhydrous ammonia tanks.

**BOOSTER LINE:** Small diameter hose wound onto a reel on a fire apparatus. Generally used for small fires such as brush and trash.

**BOOSTER TANK:** Water tank built into a fire apparatus. Usually holds between 500 and 1,000 gallons of water. This water can be used until hose lines are laid to a hydrant.

**CATCH A HYDRANT/PLUG:** To dismount from fire apparatus at a hydrant, connect fire hose to the hydrant and supply the engine company with water.

**CHARGED LINE:** A line of hose loaded with water under pressure and ready to use.

**CHECKING THE BUILDING:** Fire size-up term used when equipment arrives on the scene of an incident and no fire or smoke are visible. The act of determining if there is an actual fire. Same as Investigation.

**CHIEF:** The chief administrative officer of the fire department and chief command officer at any fire.

**COMMAND POST:** A location, established by the Incident Commander of an incident, at which management directs fire operations. Normal location for Public Information Officer or Press Liaison.

**COMPANY:** A designated number of emergency equipment. Typically, a fire engine is considered an engine company. A tanker is considered a tanker company.

**DELUGE GUN/DECK GUN/MONITOR:** A master stream appliance (hose) on top of an engine.

**DRAFT:** The process of taking water from a static source (i.e. pond, lake, portable tank, etc.) with an engine.

**EMS:** Emergency Medical Services

**ENGINE:** Firefighting vehicle that carries water and hose. Also referred to as a Pumper.

**ENGINE COMPANY:** Firefighting unit that provides extinguishment and basic emergency medical service.

**EXPOSURE:** An object, such as a building or other structure, in the proximity of a fire and in danger of being ignited by the fire's heat.

**FALSE ALARM:** An alarm given with malicious intent or without reason.

**FIRE DEPARTMENT CONNECTION/SPRINKLER CONNECTION:** Connections provided at ground level on a building through which the fire department supplies water to a building for fire suppressions.

**FIRST ALARM:** The initial alarm assignment.

**FLASHOVER:** The stage of a fire in which a room or other confined area becomes heated to the point that flames flash over the entire surface of the area igniting all contents.

**IMMEDIATE FAMILY:** Father, mother, brother, sister, spouse or child.

**INCIDENT COMMANDER:** The person in charge of the emergency scene.

**INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM (ICS):** Method of managing resources at the scene of an emergency.

**IN-SERVICE:** When an apparatus is available to respond to an alarm.

**INVESTIGATION:** See Checking the Building.

**KNOCK DOWN:** Phase of fire extinguishment where the fire is reduced to a semi-extinguished state, inhibiting its spread.

**LADDER:** A piece of fire fighting apparatus that carries an aerial ladder used for rescue and positioning of personnel on upper floors of a building. Also called Truck or Aerial.

**MOVE-UP:** Signal for a station to move apparatus to another fire station in the Department when the first station has exhausted its personnel and apparatus on an incident. This occurs primarily when more than one emergency is occurring in adjoining geographical areas.

**MUTUAL AID:** An agreement with neighboring fire departments that provides for mutual assistance in the event additional equipment is needed.

**NURSE TANKER:** A water tanker used to supply a Pumper and other tankers in turn supply that.

**OPEN-UP:** The process of effecting entry into a burning structure. The opening of windows and doors and cutting holes for ventilation.

**OUT-OF-SERVICE:** A piece of apparatus is not in a position to respond to an alarm. Generally, the apparatus needs fuel or water or is out for routine maintenance.

**OVERHAUL (aka MOP UP):** The final operation at a fire. Investigating the entire premise to determine that no more fire exists. There is also removal of some building contents for this purpose.

**PLUG:** Fire hydrant.

**PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER (PIO):** Officer responsible for relaying information to the media on the scene of an incident.

**PUMPER:** See Engine.

**PRECONNECT/PRECONNECTED LINE/CROSS LAY:** An attack line of any size that is pre-attached to a discharge outlet of an engine. Cross lays are normally 1-½ inches or 1 ¾ inches in size.

**RELAY:** The use of two or more pumpers to move water distances that would require excessive pressure if only one Pumper was used.

**REVERSY LAY:** A hose layout from the fire to the water supply that places a Pumper at the water supply.

**RUN:** The action of a fire company responding to an alarm. Usually includes its return. Same as Call.

**SAR:** Search and rescue

**SALVAGE:** Operation of reducing the damage to non-damaged goods within a structure that has burned. Example: covering furniture with salvage covers to prevent water damage.

**SIZE-UP:** The verbal appraisal via radio of conditions at the scene of an incident by the first-in company or officer. May be updated as command officers arrive on the scene.

**STEAMER CONNECTION:** A fire hydrant connection usually from 4 ½ inches to 6 inches in diameter.

**STRAIGHT LAY/FORWARD LAY:** A hose layout from the water supply to the fire that places an

engine at the fire.

**TANKER SHUTTLE:** The act of transferring water from a direct water supply via tankers to the fire.

**VENTILATE:** The operation of opening windows, doors and cutting holes in a building for the purpose of removing smoke, heat and fire gases. This action facilitates an improved working environment for firefighters, as well as reducing smoke and fire damage to the contents of the building.

**WATERGUN:** A pressurized water fire extinguisher.

**WORKER:** A fire that requires a major fire fighting effort to extinguish. Also called a Working Fire.