Firefighter Needs Report
from U of M COVID-19 Consulting Corps and MTA collaboration
MICHIGAN VolunteER FiRIfighter NeEds & COVID-19

FINDINGS & STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE
REPORT OUTLINE

POINTS TO ADDRESS

About the Survey
Key Findings
Service Delivery
Health & Safety
Recruitment
Retention
Interviews

Strategies for the Future
ABOUT THE SURVEY
COMPOSITION

26 counties
82 townships
72 respondents
9 interviews
ABOUT THE SURVEY
NUMBER OF TOWNSHIPS BY POPULATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Range</th>
<th>Number of Townships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-1,000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,001-15,000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000+</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
This survey had a small sample size of 72 respondents (n=72)*.

These 72 respondents represented 82 different townships, of Michigan's 1,240 total townships.

The small sample size of the survey may limit the study's generalizability, as well as the statistical significance of some findings.

*Not all respondents answered every question. The following data shows results only among respondents who answered a specific question.
The majority of respondents reported that obtaining PPE was a problem during COVID-19.

Concern about COVID's effect on recruitment efforts is mixed: most survey respondents considered recruitment a problem* during COVID, yet multiple fire chiefs who were interviewed did not think COVID would have any effect on recruitment efforts.

Retention became less of a problem for fire chiefs during COVID, as compared to the period pre-COVID.

*respondents reported "somewhat of a problem" or "a significant problem"
SERVICE DELIVERY
OF NOTE

75% of respondents work for a fire department that provides EMS or first response services.

53% reported that the number of firefighters responding to each call decreased during COVID as compared to the period pre-COVID.

69% reported an increase in the degree to which proper precautions and safety measures were followed.

*respondents reported "somewhat decreased" or "greatly decreased"

**respondents reported "somewhat increased" or "greatly increased"
**SERVICE DELIVERY OF NOTE**

- **68%** reported no change in a firefighter’s ability to do his or her job effectively during COVID as compared to the period pre-COVID.
- **74%** reported no change in the fire department’s overall ability to meet service delivery needs and serve the community during COVID as compared to the period pre-COVID.
- **59%** reported no change in a firefighter’s ability to be properly outfitted for a call during COVID as compared to the period pre-COVID.
HEALTH & SAFETY NEEDS OF NOTE

62% reported that obtaining PPE was a problem* during COVID-19

86% reported that infection control practices increased** during COVID-19 as compared to the period pre-COVID

58% reported that firefighters' concern about transmitting COVID-19 to family members was a problem*

*respondents reported "somewhat of a problem" or "a significant problem"

**respondents reported "somewhat increased" or "greatly increased"
80% of respondents reported that recruitment was a problem* during COVID, the same percentage reported pre-COVID.

Work hours were reported as having the greatest negative impact on recruitment.

Most effective recruiting methods:
- employee referral
- social media
- township website

*respondents reported "somewhat of a problem" or "a significant problem"
58% of respondents said retention was not a problem* pre-COVID

67% of respondents said retention was not a problem* during COVID

biggest factors affecting retention:
- work hours
- compensation
- type of work

*respondents reported "not a problem" or "not much of a problem"
**DIFFICULTY OBTAINING PPE**

The majority of interviewees said PPE was difficult to obtain early on in the pandemic, with some reporting difficulties that persisted into the summer--one fire chief had not been able to get gowns until July, while another was still unable to secure N95 masks or gowns midway through the summer.

**CHIEF-LED CREATION AND ENACTMENT OF NEW POLICIES TO LIMIT SPREAD OF INFECTION**

Lacking one unified message of how to run their fire departments during COVID, some fire chiefs created and enacted policies of their own. Multiple interviewees reported that they changed their response models, limiting the number of firefighters who entered a home during a call, and making it mandatory for firefighters to report directly to the fire station ahead of a call, as well as back to the fire station after a call, to help limit the potential spread of COVID.
LACK OF CONCERN ABOUT COVID’S EFFECT ON RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

The majority of fire chiefs interviewed did not think that COVID would have an effect on their fire department’s recruitment efforts. Instead, one fire chief noted that he had just had someone apply to work at his department, while another interviewee noted that he had been hiring during the pandemic. Another fire chief suggested that the pandemic may have had a positive effect on recruitment, making people more aware of the job and its importance.

LACK OF CONCERN ABOUT COVID’S EFFECT ON RETAINMENT EFFORTS

The majority of interviewees did not think that COVID would have an effect on their department’s retention efforts. One fire chief noted that there are ”so many things out there [that are] way more scary than COVID”.

INTERVIEWS
COMMON THEMES
Over and over, fire chiefs said the biggest barrier to recruiting new volunteer firefighters was the time commitment involved not only in the actual work, but also in the many hours of required schooling. While the educational burden required to become a firefighter cannot be reduced, the state could provide aid to lessen the financial burden incurred by initiating a state-level initiative to reduce the cost of schooling for volunteer firefighters, or offer tax relief on their education costs. In advocating for this change, recruitment and retention numbers could increase for the better.
Multiple fire chiefs spoke about the need to get a younger demographic interested and involved in volunteer firefighting. On the township level, for departments with paid on-call volunteer firefighters and those with unpaid volunteers, incentives could improve firefighter recruitment and retention. For example, if a firefighter goes on a certain percentage of calls per year, money could be deposited into a retirement account for the firefighter. In order to develop these incentives, individual fire departments will need to apply for federal grants and put any money received towards recruitment and retention efforts.