

Fire Departments and Emergency Medical Services in Rhode Island

2015/FY15-2018/FY18



Compiled by



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INTRODUCTION

Rhode Island towns utilize different types of fire departments: career, call, volunteer, and combination departments. Career fire departments employ their personnel on a full-time basis and receive regular compensation. Call fire departments receive nominal benefits and are paid when called out. Volunteer fire departments receive no compensation. A combination department usually has a limited number of personnel who are paid on a full-time basis that is augmented with a call force. Generally, career departments will be more expensive than combination departments, which will be more expensive than call departments, which will be more expensive than volunteer departments. Career departments are also known as full-time departments. Some fire departments are full-time by day but call by night and/or on weekends.

There are over 28,900 fire departments in the United States of which only about 15% are full-time departments¹ but protect almost 2/3rds of the population. Not knowing how many full-time departments there were in RI, I did a little research and put the information in this document. There are about 64 local fire departments in Rhode Island of which about twenty-eight (25) consider themselves to be full-time fire departments. Of that number, about sixteen (16) are true full-time departments (use full-time personnel exclusively) with the other “full-time” fire departments being combination departments.

Rhode Island has 39 incorporated municipalities of which 8 are cities.

- Rhode Island has no unincorporated towns. Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts are the only three New England States with no unincorporated towns and one of only four States nationwide.

In Rhode Island, the local fire departments are either municipal fire departments, part of a fire district, or private corporations.

Municipal Fire Departments

Of the 39 municipalities, 25 have a municipal fire department. A municipal fire department is part of a city or town funded by the city's or town's general fund budget which is paid for primarily through property taxes. The career departments listed in the first table are municipal departments unless it is indicated they are part of a fire district. Some of these career fire departments, however, are assisted by a volunteer fire company.

- The Prudence Island fire department is a private, non-profit volunteer fire department. The majority of their funding comes from the town as part of the municipal fire department budget. The municipal fire department provides assistance to the Prudence Island VFD for ambulance calls as they transport the patient(s) off the island to the hospital. The municipal fire department also responds to any structure fire on the island.

Some of the municipal departments are made up of fire companies or from the merger of fire companies:

- The Bay Spring Fire Department and the Barrington Fire department were formed in 1910. The two fire departments were merged into the Barrington fire department in 1930. The Hampton Meadows VFD was a private, independent fire department that ceased to exist in 2014.
- The Bristol fire department is composed of four volunteer fire companies that form the municipal fire department. The four companies are Defiance Engine & Hose Company (1905), Ever-Ready Engine & Hose Company (1924), Dreadnaught Hook Ladder & Hose (1843), and Hydraulion Engine & Hose Company (1836).

¹ U.S. Fire Department Profile Through 2015. April 2017. Hylton J.G. Haynes, and Gary P. Stein.

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- The East Greenwich fire department became a municipal department in 2013 when the East Greenwich fire district was dissolved. East Greenwich also provides fire services to a geographic district in Warwick as part of an automatic aid agreement.
- The Jamestown Fire Department started as the District No. 2 Fire Company before changing its name and being incorporated as the Jamestown Fire Department in 1897. The Jamestown EMS service merged with the Jamestown Fire Department to become the Jamestown Fire and Rescue Department in 2011.
- Johnston had four independent volunteer fire departments up until March 1970. They all became a unified department at that time.
- The Little Compton Fire Department was formed in 1969 when it assumed the duties of the Little Compton Fire Association which was established in 1938.
- Newport was initially serviced by nine individual fire companies which were run by a Board of Engineers in 1822 composed of a “chief” representing each fire company AND all the fire companies reporting to one overall chief. The Newport Fire Department was created in 1858. In 1874, the department became a paid department. The volunteers were no longer used and when the fire department went completely motorized in 1915, most of the volunteer fire companies disbanded and their stations sold.
- Pawtucket became a paid department in 1874 and grew to 6 engine companies and 3 truck companies (Warwick Aerial Ladder Truck Company #1, Slater Hook-and-Ladder Company #2, Watcher Hook and Ladder Company #3, Rhode Island Chemical and Hose Company #1, Rough and Ready Chemical and Hose Company #2, Monitor Hose Company #3, Atlantic Chemical and Hose Company #4, Fairlawn Chemical and Hose Company #5, Darlington Chemical and Hose Company #6).
- Providence was serviced by twelve volunteer fire companies up until 1854 when the Fire Department was formed to replace the voluntary fire companies that were in existence at the time. The last voluntary company disbanded in 1866.
- Smithfield was initially serviced by two fire districts - District 1 was serviced by the Greenville Fire Department (established in 1870) and District 2 was served by the Georgiaville Fire Company. Both were merged into the Smithfield Fire Department in 1966.
- The West Warwick Fire Department was formerly established in 1947 and became a unified fire department in 1948 when the Riverpoint Fire Department (1888), Crompton Fire Department (1890), the Natick Fire Department (1872), and the Warwick Fire Department (1889) all merged with the West Warwick Fire Department.

Fire Districts

Eleven towns have fire services provided by one or more fire districts. While the other New England States have fire districts, they are far more prevalent in Connecticut and Rhode Island. A fire district is a quasi-municipal corporation. It is an independent governmental entity that exists separately from the municipality in which it resides. They are usually created for specific purposes such as fire, water, lighting, sewer, etc. As such, they have their own taxing authority. Usually, district taxes are included in the property tax bill put out by the municipality and the municipality passes the district taxes on to the district. However, some districts have their own tax collector and those district residents receive two property tax bills, one from the town and one from the district.

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However, not all fire districts exist to provide fire services. For example, the Bonnet Shores fire district provides trash collection and recreational services but not fire services while the North Tiverton and Stone Bridge fire districts provide water services only.

Some fire districts provide more than just fire services. For example, the Hopkins Hill fire district is also responsible for street lighting, and the Harrisville fire district also provides water services.

Towns with a single fire district providing fire services to the entire town are Cumberland and Exeter.

- Cumberland has one fire district. The Cumberland fire district was formed by the merger of the Ashton and Berkeley Fire Departments in 1992. The Cumberland, Cumberland Hill, North Cumberland and Valley Falls fire districts all officially merged into the Cumberland fire district in 2015.
- The Exeter fire district funds the two fire departments, Exeter VFD #1 and Exeter VFD #2 plus it funds the ambulance service, Exeter Rescue, and the Exeter Dispatch Center. All four agencies are private, non-profit corporations. By charter, the fire district commission is composed of a representative from each of the organizations funded by the fire district and three members from the town.

Towns with multiple fire districts providing fire services to the town include Burrillville, Coventry, Glocester, Hopkinton, Lincoln, Richmond, South Kingston, and Westerly.

- Burrillville has four fire districts: Harrisville, Nasonville, Oakland-Mapleville, and Pascoag. Wallum Lake is an independent fire department in the Pascoag Fire District. Pascoag covers the western part of Burrillville, Nasonville covers the eastern part of Burrillville. Harrisville borders Pascoag and covers the village of Harrisville and a portion of Glendale. Oakland-Mapleville is situated between Harrisville and Nasonville and covers the villages of Oakland, Mapleville, and a portion of Glendale.
 - Residents in Nasonville have voted down the budget in the Fall of 2018 which led to the career firefighters being let go and the volunteers resigning. In March 2019, residents then voted to dissolve the fire district. Currently, fire protection is provided by the Oakland-Mapleville fire department.
- Charlestown has four fire districts: Charlestown, Dunn's Corner, Quonochontaug Central Beach, and Shady Harbor. The Charlestown fire district was formed in 1979 and operates two fire departments - the Charlestown/Richmond fire department and the Cross Mills fire department. The Dunn's Corner fire district spans portions of two towns, Charlestown and Westerly, with a fire station located in each town. The other two fire districts do not have their own fire department but instead contract for fire services from the Dunn's Corner fire department which was formed in 1942.
- Coventry has four fire districts: Central Coventry, Coventry (Anthony), Hopkins Hill, and Western Coventry. The Harris, Tiogue, and Washington fire districts merged into the Central Coventry Fire District in 2006.
- Glocester has three fire districts: Chepachet, Harmony, and West Glocester. Each is their own village within the town of Glocester. Harmony covers the eastern portion of Glocester, Chepachet covers the central portion of Glocester, and West Glocester covers the western portion of Glocester.
- Hopkinton has two fire districts: Ashaway and Hope Valley/Wyoming with the Hope Valley/Wyoming fire district spanning two towns, Hopkinton and Richmond.
- Lincoln has five fire districts: Albion, Lime Rock, Manville, Quinnville, and Saylesville. The Fairlawn fire district merged into the Saylesville Fire District in 1998. Lonsdale merged into the Saylesville fire district in 2018. Albion and Saylesville have proposed a merger to take effect in 2020.
- Richmond has two fire districts: Richmond-Carolina and Hope Valley/Wyoming. The Hope Valley fire district spans parts of Richmond and Hopkinton.

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- South Kingston has three fire districts: Indian Lake Shores, Kingston, and Union. Indian Lake Shores does not have its own fire department but instead contracts for fire services from the Union fire district.
- Westerly has seven fire districts: Bradford, Dunn's Corners, Misquamicut, Shelter Harbor, Watch Hill, Weekapaug, and Westerly. The Weekapaug fire district does not have its own fire department but instead contracts for fire services from the Misquamicut Fire District. The Shelter Harbor fire district also does not have a fire department but instead contracts for fire services from the Dunn's Corners fire district. The Bradford fire department disbanded in 2014 and the fire district now contracts for fire services from the Dunn's Corners fire district.

Private Fire Departments

Six towns do not have a municipal fire department nor fire districts. Foster, Scituate, and West Greenwich have multiple private volunteer fire departments, each in a geographic fire district not a taxing fire district. Each has their own fire chief and each receives funding from their town.

- Foster has three private volunteer fire departments: Foster Center Fire Company, Moosup Valley Fire Company, and South Foster Fire Company. Each owns their own fire station but the town owns the fire apparatus. In Foster, all three fire departments respond to any structure fire.
- Scituate has four private volunteer fire departments: Chopmist Hill Fire Dept., Hope-Jackson Fire Company, North Scituate Fire Dept., and Pottersville Fire Dept. The town owns the Pottersville and Chopmist fire stations and most of the fire apparatus.
- West Greenwich has three private volunteer departments: Hianloland Fire Company, Lake Mishnock Fire Dept., and West Greenwich Fire Company. Each fire company owns their fire stations.

New Shoreham and North Smithfield have a single private, non-profit corporation providing fire and EMS services to the town. Each has their own fire chief and each receives funding from their town.

- New Shoreham contracts with the private, non-profit Block Island Fire and Rescue to provide fire services to the town. However, the town owns the fire station and fire apparatus.
- North Smithfield also has no fire department so it contracts with the private, non-profit North Smithfield fire department to provide fire and EMS services to the town. The town owns the fire apparatus but the North Smithfield fire department owns the fire stations. This fire department came into existence in 2002 resulting from the merger of the North Smithfield Volunteer fire department and the Primrose Volunteer fire department.

National Standards

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) developed a standard, known as NFPA 1710, to guide full-time fire departments on the minimum number of personnel needed for safe and effective firefighting. To provide EMS care (including transport), the State of Rhode Island and NFPA 1710 requires at a minimum 2 personnel. With the majority of the call volume increasingly becoming EMS related, I choose two (2) in-house EMTs and/or firefighters to be the minimum staffing level as the requirement for a fire department to be deemed capable of providing immediate coverage.

Two represents the minimum number of personnel to respond to an EMS call not to a structure fire. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 29 CFR 1910.134(g)(4) defines a "2-in/2-out" rule for fighting interior structure fires. Responding to a structure fire with less than four firefighters prevents the first responding unit from complying with OSHA's "2-in/2-out" standard, and places the lives of those firefighters in

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jeopardy. Whether the towns listed in this document comply with this regulation is not known nor is that the purpose of this document.

Fire Budgets

The budgets for all the municipalities (but not fire districts) can be found on the Cities and Towns budget page on the Municipal Affairs web site.

- All towns and cities in Rhode Island are on a fiscal year. Some fire districts are on a fiscal year, some on a calendar year and others on something in-between.

The state requires all municipalities (but not fire districts) to file the Adopted budget and Employee Benefits form (form 44-5). Some municipalities include employee benefits and pension costs in the fire department budget. Many do not. Therefore, the State tries to have comparable data so the State has the municipalities report employee and pension costs separate from the fire department budget. Without the employee benefit costs, any comparison is really not possible.

Ideally, it would be better to show the true operating costs or full-cost budget which has all costs allocated to each department so it is clear what it costs to run that department. As such, a full-cost budget for the fire department has wages, benefits, insurance, utilities, fuel, pension costs, equipment repairs, and hydrant rentals in its departmental operating budget. I am keeping capital budget (including debt service) separate since most towns do capital outlays as warrant articles. Of the full-time fire departments, only the fire districts provide a full-cost budget and North Smithfield fire department which is a private, non-profit fire company.

- Barrington, Central Falls, Jamestown, North Providence, Providence, Tiverton, Warwick, West Warwick, and Woonsocket do not include pensions in the fire department budget. Cranston includes a portion but the majority of its pension obligation is not in the fire department budget.
- Bristol, Central Falls, Jamestown, Middletown, North Kingstown, North Providence, Portsmouth, Smithfield, and Warren do not include hydrant rentals in the fire department budget.
- Barrington, Central Falls, Cranston, North Kingstown, North Providence, Providence, and Warren do not include some or all utilities (heat, water, telephone, and electricity) in their fire budget.
- Barrington, Bristol, Central Falls, Jamestown, North Providence, Providence, Tiverton, Warren, Warwick, West Warwick, and Woonsocket do not include health and dental coverage in their fire department budget.

Ambulance Service

In Rhode Island, EMS services are coordinated through the State's Department of Health. BLS and ALS staffing and ambulance transport are defined by the "Rules and Regulations Relating to Emergency Medical Services (R23-4.1-EMS" regulations. Rhode Island has four levels of staffing: EMT-B, EMT-I, EMT-C, and EMT-P. For ambulance service, Rhode Island has three levels: BLS, ALS intermediate, and ALS paramedic. The state requires two (2) licensed personnel to be in a transporting ambulance at all times

BLS -> 2 licensed providers with one being EMT-B

ALS intermediate -> 2 licensed EMTs with at least one at EMT-C level or higher

ALS paramedic -> 2 licensed EMTs with both at EMT-P level or one EMT-P and one EMT-I

There are no commercial ambulance companies providing emergency ambulance service to any of the municipalities as emergency ambulance transports is mostly handled by fire departments.

Most towns with full-time fire departments have an ambulance service provided by the fire department or have a municipal ambulance service.

- Barrington, Central Falls, Cranston, East Greenwich, East Providence, Jamestown, Johnston, Little Compton, Middletown, Narragansett, Newport, North Kingstown, North Providence, Portsmouth,

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Providence, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warren, Warwick, West Warwick, and Woonsocket have a municipal ambulance service provided by the fire department.

- Burrillville, Coventry, and Glocester have multiple fire districts with the fire department in each fire district providing ambulance service to that district.
- Cumberland, Lincoln, and South Kingstown may have multiple fire districts but the ambulance service is a municipal service separate from any fire department. In Lincoln, the ambulances are housed in the Albion and Lonsdale fire stations and are supervised by the fire district's fire chief though the ambulance employees are town employees.
 - Cumberland Rescue became a municipal department in 1981. It was originally part of the Ashton Fire district.
 - Lincoln Rescue in the Albion Fire station covers Albion and Manville. Lincoln Rescue in the Lonsdale Fire station covers Quinville, and Saylesville.
- Charlestown, Exeter, Foster, Hopkinton, Richmond, Scituate, and Westerly have ambulance service provided by a private, non-profit corporation.
- Bristol ambulances are staffed by volunteer personnel who get a small stipend per call. The town also subcontracts with Paramedic Systems Inc. which provides 2 paramedics that respond to all EMS calls when available to supplement the volunteer personnel.

The ambulance member fees, patient receipts, and paramedic intercepts are significant revenue sources. The fees and patient receipts are revenue deposited in either the General Fund or a special reserve fund. Ultimately, both mechanisms are used to reduce taxes in some form.

When a town has a municipal ambulance service that is separate from the fire department, the fire department may still provide a first responder service. While the town collects fees for the ambulance service, the fire department is not able to collect any monies. This is fine if the fire and ambulance services are both municipal departments because the receipts go into the general fund. But in towns with fire districts, none of the fire departments in the fire districts are able to collect any fees for the first responder service they provide. But the first responder service provided is very important as treatment is started before the ambulance arrives and the firefighters assist the ambulance service personnel.

Just as volunteer fire departments have experienced significant decreases in volunteers, volunteer ambulance services have had similar experiences. The NY Times ran an article "Sounding the Siren for Volunteer Drivers" in October 2001 indicating that the lack of volunteers is due to (1) significant training time; (2) yearly recertification; (3) fewer employers being willing to let employees leave; and (4) increases in call volume requiring more time commitments. As a result, many volunteer ambulance service providers are starting to hire daytime personnel as this is considered to be the time period of greatest need.

Estimating Ambulance Service Costs

For towns that don't break out the cost of their ambulance and fire services separately due to having cross-trained personnel, how can one estimate the cost of the ambulance service? A generally accepted costing model on how to estimate the cost of EMS services for such a fire department has the following formula:

- A. Personnel Costs = average on-call time x average hourly labor rate x average number of personnel on the call x number of incidents prior year. (Hourly rate includes benefits)
- B. Vehicle = (Operating cost per mile x annual call miles) + annual cost for ambulance replacement.
- C. Supplies = Actual Cost of Medical Supplies per year + costs of billing service.
- D. Indirect Costs = 25% (A+B+C). 25% is used as a factor to address other benefits and training costs.

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Several fire departments in the state use this formula in determining the fee to charge towns contracting for ambulance service. There is some merit to taking the formula in part A and multiplying it by the number of shifts but that is not considered part of the formula at this time.

Document Organization

The coverage information is provided in three tables. The first table lists those fire departments that provide immediate coverage 24/7.

The second table lists those fire departments that provide immediate coverage for some portion of the day. All provide immediate coverage during the weekday because of the difficulty getting call firefighters to respond during the day. The coverage end time varies anywhere from 4PM to midnight. Each table lists the town, its last known population and the land coverage area in square miles, who dispatches the fire department, the budget numbers for fire and ambulance/EMS, ambulance revenue, staffing information, and call volume. The population for the fire districts came from Table 1 in the "Report on the Rhode Island Fire districts" prepared by the Department of Revenue.

The third table lists those fire departments that provide 24/7 coverage but it is not immediate coverage as there is no staff in-house when the call first comes in. In other words, it lists the call and volunteer fire departments. NFPA 1720 guides volunteer fire departments on the minimum number of personnel needed for safe and effective firefighting.

While this document will not provide staffing information for the call/volunteer departments, it should be noted that the number of people able to participate as firefighters has dropped significantly in many towns for several reasons: time demands, increased training requirements, increase in call volume requiring more time commitments, changes in sociological conditions, fire leadership problems, and increasing use of combination departments². As a result, many volunteer or on-call fire departments are starting to hire two daytime firefighters as this is considered to be the time period of greatest need.

Staffing Levels

The National Institute of Standards and Technology published a report in 2010 entitled "Report on Residential Fireground Field Experiments". This report found that a four person crew completed all tasks on the fireground 30% faster than a two person crew and 25% faster than a three person crew. Similar results were seen with laddering and ventilation. Interestingly, four person crews completed primary search and rescue operations 6% faster than three person crews but 30% faster than two person crews. Two person crews took almost a minute longer than three person crews to stretch a hose line and almost 90 seconds longer than four person crews. With this in mind, it might be interesting to see what the staffing levels are in Rhode Island fire departments.

The first line in the staffing levels column shows full-time and on-call. Full-time personnel are career firefighters, chief officers, and any full-time civilians (i.e., executive secretary and dispatchers). The initial staffing levels in FY07 are shown and if there has been any change in staffing levels, it will be followed by an arrow ('=>') and then the new levels. The second line in the staffing levels column reflects the number of groups or platoons using full-time personnel.

The third line is the shift schedule (for those departments that provide 24/7 immediate coverage). Most full-time fire departments in Rhode Island use a 10/14 shift schedule. This means that a fire fighter works two 10-hour days followed by two 14-hour nights followed by four days off. The cycle then repeats. There are a couple of departments that use a 1-1-1-5 shift which is 1 day on, 1 day off, 1 day on, and 5 days off (where 1 day is 24h).

² "Retention and Recruitment in the Volunteer Fire Service: Problems and Solutions", December 1998

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- The Harrisville fire department staffs its fire station two career firefighters during the weekday and one career firefighter on nights and weekends.
- The Hopkins Hill fire department staffs its fire station with two personnel round-the-clock. They use a part-time firefighter to staff the station at night.
- Jamestown fire department is staffed weekdays with a full-time dispatcher plus the fire chief and deputy chief. The EMS side is staffed with 4 volunteers per 6h shift. Both departments provide property tax abatement for residents in the fire and rescue department and an incentive award.
- The Pascoag fire department staffs five career firefighters during the weekday and weeknights and one career firefighter during the weekends. They also staff one per-diem firefighter weeknights from 4PM to midnight.

The fourth line is the number of fire stations in the municipality or district.

Call Volume

Firefighters are trained for firefighting and for EMT duties. Emergency response has been consolidated into many fire departments such that the majority of the call volume for a fire department today is EMS-related not fire. In fact, over the last 20 years, the number of EMS responses has more than tripled while fires have decreased by almost 50%³. It is estimated that 66% of all fire department calls in 2004 were EMS-related⁴. As we have seen with the floods in March 2010, fire departments are expected to respond to natural disasters. With the advent of 9/11, fire departments also are expected to respond to acts of terrorism. So, the role of a firefighter has changed dramatically from years ago. The fire department is also involved in fire prevention activities (such as public education and property inspections) and on-going training of its personnel.

The EMS call volume will be that of the fire department unless the numbers are in green. Any numbers in green represent the call volume of the ambulance provider not the fire department.

Keep in mind that the call volume does not reflect the call response time. For example, the call volume may go down by a few calls but the call response time may actually be higher. So, call volume alone is not necessarily the only indicator of measuring the “busyness” of a fire department. Another example is the number of EMS calls. While the number of EMS calls may represent 66% of all calls, it is important to remember that an EMS call typically requires on average about 45 minutes and two or three personnel. Fire calls frequently require most, if not all, on-duty personnel and take many hours to mitigate. When looking at it from this perspective, the number of hours spent performing EMS functions versus fire functions is more like 50% each. Unfortunately, in at least one municipality, the officials looked at the call percentage and concluded that if the EMS service was privatized, it would reduce workload by 62% and hence, the fire department would not need as many personnel. Therefore, it cannot be stressed enough that call volume alone is not necessarily the only indicator of measuring the “busyness” of a fire department.

A comparison of municipal call volume across the New England States can be found in Appendix A to see if there are any trends in EMS and/or fire calls across New England.

Mutual Aid

An issue of growing concern for some fire departments is the increase in the number of simultaneous calls. This is not an area that much attention has been paid to but it puts additional stresses on a department. When an incident or multiple simultaneous incidents occur such that the available local fire department resources are overwhelmed, then additional help is summoned from other nearby fire departments. When fire departments help each other in this fashion, it is called Mutual Aid. In fact, a recent survey conducted for ISO⁵ indicates

³ Effective Fire Protection: A National Concern. A Study by the Insurance Service Office (ISO).

⁴ Fire Loss in the United States During 2011. September 2012. Michael J. Karter, Jr.

⁵ Fire Chief's Opinion 2008. ISO, September 2008

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that over 50% of fire departments call on mutual aid to respond to initial alarms for a structure fire due to lack of responders.

In some communities, a fire department in an adjacent municipality can provide a quicker response than the local fire department. Typically, these fire departments enter into an Automatic Mutual Aid agreement. Automatic Aid provides for a fire department in another municipality to immediately respond to reported fires because it is closer, thus providing the quickest response of manpower and equipment to incidents, and allowing more of the municipality to remain protected at all times. In the same ISO Survey, over 60% indicated that neighboring departments responded due to Automatic Aid agreements.

Automatic Mutual Aid is set up as agreements between participating fire departments. Mutual Aid is set up as Run cards and clearly defines which fire departments are to respond to a fire when requested at different fire alarm levels.

When mutual aid is required, there is a state wide mutual aid response system in place to facilitate this process. There are four regional control centers, each controlling all mutual aid in its respective region. In this way, the municipality does not need to coordinate its own mutual aid. The four regions are the Metro Control Region in Cranston, the Northern Control Region in Smithfield, the Southern Control Region in Exeter, and the East Bay Control Region in Portsmouth.

Fire Dispatch

One of the keys to limiting damage caused by fire is the response time. NFPA 1710 sets a goal for all fire departments to respond to a fire within 6 minutes. Response time is defined as the time from when a 911 call is first received to the time a fire truck arrives on scene. Part of this 6-minute window is 1 minute for dispatch time. Fire and ambulance agencies are dispatched from a dispatch center. Some people believe that all 911 calls go directly to their local dispatch center rather than to a central location. Basic 911 Service is an emergency telephone system that automatically connects 911 callers to a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). Enhanced-911 service does the same plus shows the caller's name, street address, and telephone number to the PSAP. This allows the PSAP to identify the caller's location automatically if the caller is unable to communicate this information verbally to the PSAP call taker. Enhanced-911 services are provided by the Rhode Island Enhanced 911 Uniform Emergency Telephone System and are paid for by a monthly user fee on all telephones (land and wireless).

In Rhode Island, there is one PSAP but most towns have their own local dispatch center.

Rhode Island	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total 911 calls	533,768	522,779	511,810	514,926	496,401	460,817	461,218
EMS 911 calls	133,038	133,709	134,126	143,614	145,536	120,883	130,252
%EMS Calls	24.9%	25.6%	26.2%	27.9%	29.3%	26.2%	28.2%
Fire calls	70,168	63,023	67,224	67,751	72,606	75,567	74,401

The total 911 calls and the EMS 911 calls were taken from the Call Volume Report Summary published by the Rhode Island Enhanced 911 Uniform Emergency Telephone System.

Issues Facing Fire Departments in RI:

Aging apparatus and facilities. It is estimated that 39% of all engines in RI fire departments are at least 15 years old⁶. This is close to the national average. The industry standard for the life span of a fire engine is 15 years followed by 5 years of reserve status. Starting in 2007, the EPA's new emission standards go into effect to

⁶ Third Needs Assessment of the Fire Service in Rhode Island. October 2011. NFPA Fire Analysis and Research, Quincy MA

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which the fire apparatus industry must comply. It is estimated that this will increase the cost of a new engine by as much as 50K. These new emission standards will significantly reduce the amounts of nitrous oxide, particulate matter, and non-methane hydrocarbon (NMHC) emissions.

Roughly 71% of the existing fire stations are estimated to be over 40 years old, 3% have no backup power and 8% are not equipped for exhaust emission control per NFPA 1500 2002 9.1.6.

Most fire departments are not able to meet the OSHA 2in-2out rule as most departments have the first response engine containing less than 4 firefighters.

CAVEAT EMPTOR

The personnel and number of stations initially came from the Fire Department Census Survey found on the US Fire Administration website and were cross-referenced with information from the town web sites and/or town reports. The population numbers were taken from the US Census Bureau.

The information in this document came from various sources (comprehensive plans, fire officials, audit reports) and the information was verified to the extent it was possible. While I tried to be as accurate as possible, there is the possibility for errors. Hopefully, if there are any errors, someone will be kind enough to point them out to me.

Special thanks to George Pennachi, the former Fire Marshal for the City of Newport and unofficial history for the Newport Fire Department.

Changes in Staffing Levels

2007:

North Kingstown increases shift staffing by two by hiring eight firefighters.
Providence hires three firefighters.

2008:

Smithfield increases shift staffing by two by hiring eight firefighters.

2010:

East Providence decreases shift staffing by seven by not filling eight firefighter positions and laying off all probationary firefighters (20).
Pawtucket decreases shift staffing by one by not filling four firefighter positions.
Providence decreases shift staffing by five by not filling twenty (20) firefighter positions.
Warwick reduces firefighter positions by eight.
Woonsocket decreases shift staffing by two by laying off ten firefighters.

2011:

Cranston reduces firefighter positions by five.
East Providence increases shift staffing by three by hiring twelve firefighters.
Jamestown Fire Department and Jamestown Emergency Medical Services merge.
North Kingstown reduces shift staffing by one by reducing the firefighter head count by four.
Providence decreases shift staffing by four by not filling eighteen (18) firefighter positions.

2012:

North Kingstown reduces the firefighter head count by eight by going to a different staffing schedule.

2013:

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East Greenwich Fire District merges with the town of East Greenwich to form a municipal fire dept.

2016:

The Cumberland, Cumberland Hill, North Cumberland and Valley Falls fire districts all officially merged into the Cumberland fire district.

2017:

Barrington increases shift staffing to seven by hiring 4 additional firefighters.

Oakland-Mapleville FD has two per diem personnel staffed 24/7 for ALS ambulance but cross-trained for firefighting.

2018:

Nasonville fire district residents vote down budget leading to the layoffs of all the career firefighters.

2019:

Barrington changes its shift schedule from 10/14 to 1-2-1-4 with minimum staffing increasing from 5 to 6.

Nasonville residents vote to dissolve the fire district with Saylesville providing fire coverage.

Fire Departments Providing 24/7 Immediate Coverage

This table lists those towns with full-time fire departments that provide immediate round-the-clock fire protection. It should be noted that for the fire districts, the incident counts include out-of-district responses. This means that one incident could be counted as an incident in each fire district.

Department	FD Est	Pop/ Cover Area	Dispatch	Staffing Levels FT/Call Shift Schedule	Min Staff Levl	Total EMS (15-18)	Total Calls (15-18)	EMS Provider	Transport Agency
Barrington	1910	16,293 over 15 sq mi	Barrington PD	29/0 4 groups of 7 1-2-1-4 shift 2 stations	6	1727 1863 1678 1779	2500 2625 2493 2675	Barrington FD	Barrington FD
Burrillville – Oakland- Mapleville FD ⁷	1934	4,000 over 13 sq mi	Burrillville PD	2 groups of 2 12h shift 1 station	2	464 513 594 #	635 723 791 851	Oakland- Mapleville FD	Oakland- Mapleville FD
Central Falls	1847	19,416 over 1.3 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	38/0 4 groups of 9 1-1-1-5 shift 1 station	7	2359 2833 2968 3353	4862 4578 4376 5025	Central Falls FD	Central Falls FD
Coventry – Central Coventry Fire District		18,000 over 26 sq mi	Coventry PD	41/0 3 groups of 10 1-1-1-1-1-4 shift 4 stations	8	2556 2751 2287 2186	3343 3667 3554 3937	Central Coventry FD	Central Coventry FD
Coventry – Coventry Fire District	1889	17,000 over 5.5 sq mi	Coventry PD	17/10 => 9/10 4 groups of 2 10/14 shift 1 station	2	1414 1403 1549 1663	1857 1806 1945 2093	Coventry FD	Coventry FD
Cranston	1920	80,566 over 30 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	210/0 4 groups of 45 10/14 shift 6 stations	41	10,956 9349 10,048 12,273	14,992 14,203 15,311 16,599	Cranston FD	Cranston FD
Cumberland	1930	34,055 over 28.6 sq mi	Cumberland PD	52/5 4 groups of 12 10/14 shift 4 stations	12	2730 2734 3140 3284	4180 4079 4557 4760	Cumberland Rescue	Cumberland Rescue
East Greenwich		13,131 over 17 sq mi	East Greenwich PD	35/8 4 groups of 8 10/14 shift 2 stations	8	2012 1981 2347 No Data	3255 3334 4122 No Data	East Greenwich FD	East Greenwich FD
East Providence	1875	47,149 over 17 sq mi	East Providence PD	121/0 4 groups of 28 10/14 shift 4 stations	25	7683 7210 8212 8400	11,271 11,356 11,780 12,205	East Providence FD	East Providence FD
Johnston	1970	29,045 over 24 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	88/0 4 groups of 21 10/14 shift 4 stations	21	5458 5329 5690 No Data	6897 7087 7270 No Data	Johnson FD	Johnson FD
Little Compton	1938	3,503 over 29 sq mi	Little Compton PD	9/17 4 groups of 2 10/14 shift 1 station	None	464 486 445 414	770 821 812 818	Little Compton FD	Little Compton FD
Lincoln – Lime Rock Fire District	1948	5,600 over 9.2 sq mi	Lincoln PD	22/9 4 groups of 4 10/14 shift 2 stations		768 974 1248 947	1401 1643 2030 1575	Lincoln Rescue	Lincoln Rescue

⁷ Oakland-Mapleville employs per diems for each shift.

Fire and Emergency Medical Services in Rhode Island

Department	FD Est	Pop/ Cover Area	Dispatch	Staffing Levels FT/Call Shift Schedule	Min Staff Level	Total EMS (15-18)	Total Calls (15-18)	EMS Provider	Transport Agency
Middletown	1922	16,154 over 15 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	32/0 4 groups of 7 10/14 shift 1 station	6	2643 2445 2728 2738	3424 3440 3599 3751	Middletown FD	Middletown FD
Narragansett	1901	15,706 over 38 sq mi	Narragansett PD	35/0 4 groups of 8 10/14 shift 3 stations	8	1659 1673 1635 1730	2666 2694 2752 2790	Narragansett FD	Narragansett FD
Newport	1822	24,027 over 11 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	99/4 4 groups of 23 10/14 shift 4 stations	18	3960 3586 3662 3823	6533 6147 6146 6602	Newport FD	Newport FD
North Kingstown	1917	26,184 over 58 sq mi	North Kingstown PD	73/0 => 67/0 4 groups of 15 10/14 shift 3 stations	15	2692 3262 3194 3587	5180 5495 5668 3587	North Kingstown FD	North Kingstown FD
North Providence	1896	32,238 over 5.8 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	110/0 => 92/0 4 groups of 20 10/14 shift 4 stations	20	4759 5032 4686 4678	7428 7307 7534 7839	North Providence FD	North Providence FD
North Smithfield	2002	12,178 over 25 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	23/15 4 groups of 5 1-1-1-5 shift 2 stations	21	1798 1921 1965 2043	2432 2550 3151 3194	North Smithfield FD	North Smithfield FD
Pawtucket	1874	71,172 over 9 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	150/0 => 146/0 4 groups of 34 10/14 shift 6 stations	31	11,131 10,669 10,647 12,714	15,415 15,666 16,154 16,730	Pawtucket FD	Pawtucket FD
Portsmouth	1935	17,383 over 59 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	35/0 4 groups of 8 10/14 shift 1 station	8	1955 2204 2364 2010	3099 3182 3154 2919	Portsmouth FD	Portsmouth FD
Providence	1854	177,994 over 20.5 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	487/0 4 groups of 108 10/14 shift 14 stations	88	29,739 28,460 28,310 34,468	41,783 43,303 43,272 45,475	Providence FD	Providence FD
Smithfield	1870	21,410 over 28 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	58/4 4 groups of 11 10/14 shift 3 stations	10	3439 3020 3057 3530	4561 4224 4604 4531	Smithfield FD	Smithfield FD
Tiverton		15,858 over 36 sq mi	Tiverton PD	28/0 3 groups of 8 48/96 shift 3 stations	7	2032 2282 2197 2302	3134 3234 3181 3287	Tiverton FD	Tiverton FD
Warwick	1956	81,971 over 50 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	232/0 4 groups of 48 10/14 shift 1 station	45	10,2681 0,568 10,634 13,340	15,516 16,106 16,102 17,253	Warwick FD	Warwick FD
West Warwick	1947	28,893 over 8 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	74/0 4 groups of 15 1-1-1-5 shift 4 stations	15	5297 5219 5128 5002	7306 7004 7025 7124	West Warwick FD	West Warwick FD
Woonsocket	1836	41,026 over 8 sq mi	Self- Dispatch	133/0 => 125/0 4 groups of 28/29 1-1-1-5 shift 5 stations	21	7554 6947 7975 7862	10,271 9624 10,619 10,704	Woonsocket FD	Woonsocket FD

Combination Departments Providing Immediate Coverage by Day/On-call Nights (and/or Weekends)

Department	FD Est	Pop/ Cover Area	Dispatch	Staffing Levels FT/Call	Total EMS (15-18)	Total Calls (15-18)	EMS Provider	Transport Agency
Burrillville – Harrisville Fire District	1912	4,000 over 20 sq mi.	Burrillville PD	5/46 2 groups of 2/1 1 station	661 647 667 794	904 938 950 942	Harrisville FD	Harrisville FD
Burrillville – Pascoag Fire District	1903	10,000 over 26 sq mi.	Burrillville PD	7/12 1 group of 5 2 stations	978 729 700 822	1232 1156 No Data 1103	Pascoag FD	Pascoag FD
Coventry – Hopkins Hill Fire District	1952	5,000 over 2.2 sq mi	Coventry PD	8/39 4 groups of 2 1 station	631 692 724 823	1044 1070 1164 1349	Hopkins Hill FD	Hopkins Hill FD
Lincoln – Albion Fire District	1941	3,200 over 3.6 sq mi	Lincoln PD	5/20 1 group of 5 1 station	573 776 825 867	1141 1375 1567 1489	Lincoln Rescue	Lincoln Rescue
Lincoln – Saylesville Fire District ⁸	1896	3,800 over 2 sq mi	Lincoln PD	3/24 1 group of 3 1 station	649 768 811 745	1217 1417 1484 1403	Lincoln Rescue	Lincoln Rescue

⁸ Saylesville shows a jump in calls due to now providing coverage for the Lonsdale fire district

Towns with a Call Fire Department

This table lists those towns with a fire department that provides 24/7 coverage but it is not immediate. In other words, it is a call fire department.

Department	FD Est.	Pop/ Cover Area	Dispatch	Total EMS (15-17)	Total Calls (15-17)	EMS Provider	Transport Agency
Bristol Defiance Hose Dreadnaught HL EverReady Hose Hydraulion Hose	1905 1843 1924 1836	22,385 over 10 sq mi	Bristol PD	2833 2959 3443	3636 3814 4393	Bristol FD	Bristol FD/PSI
Charlestown Fire District	1979	7781 over 32 sq mi	Charlestown PD	1108 996 1074	189 230 248	Charlestown Rescue	Charlestown Rescue
Coventry – Western Coventry Fire District	1942	4,600 over 32 sq mi	Coventry PD	400 355 402	525 492 603	Western Coventry FD	Western Coventry FD
Exeter – Exeter VFD #1	1944	6546 over 58.4 sq mi	Exeter EDC	910 1022 1087	292 311 282	Exeter Rescue Corps	Exeter Rescue Corps
Exeter – Exeter VFD #2	1944		Exeter EDC		135 143 147	Exeter Rescue Corps	Exeter Rescue Corps
Foster – Foster Center Fire Company	1953	4656 over 52 sq mi	Foster PD	692 622 681	288 236 174	Foster Amb Corps	Foster Amb Corps
Foster – Moosup Valley Fire company			Foster PD		181 179 172	Foster Amb Corps	Foster Amb Corps
Foster – South Foster Fire Company	1928		Foster PD		415 414 305	Foster Amb Corps	Foster Amb Corps
Glocester – Chepachet Fire District	1912	5,000 over 26 sq mi	Glocester PD	570 672 661	808 866 825	Chepachet FD	Chepachet FD
Glocester – Harmony Fire District	1924	3,050 over 18 sq mi	Glocester PD	379 369 344	543 481 566	Harmony FD	Harmony FD
Glocester – West Glocester Fire District	1959	1,675 over 27 sq mi	Glocester PD	371 332 356	459 414 430	West Glocester FD	West Glocester FD
Hopkinton – Ashaway Fire District	1936	2,500 over 20 sq mi	Westerly Dispatch Center	530 # 512	320 400 350	Ashaway Ambulance	Ashaway Ambulance
Hopkinton – Hope Valley Fire District	1982	8,000 over 50 sq mi	Westerly Dispatch Center	1400 to 1500 calls	463 478 585	Hope-Valley Ambulance	Hope-Valley Ambulance
Jamestown	1891	5,472 over 35 sq mi	Jamestown PD	578 580 486	868 865 786	Jamestown FD	Jamestown FD
Lincoln – Manville Fire District	1891	3,300 over 1 sq mi	Lincoln PD	4172 4478 4542	696 896 868	Lincoln Rescue	Lincoln Rescue
Lincoln – Quinnville Fire District	1928	1,000 over 1 sq mi	Lincoln PD		302 302 251	Lincoln Rescue	Lincoln Rescue
New Shoreham		1,041 over 9.7 sq mi	New Shoreham PD	Unable to get data	Unable to get data	Block Island Fire & Rescue	Block Island Fire & Rescue

Fire and Emergency Medical Services in Rhode Island

Department	FD Est.	Pop/ Cover Area	Dispatch	Total EMS (15-17)	Total Calls (15-17)	EMS Provider	Transport Agency
Richmond-Carolina Fire District	1986	4,000 over 20 sq mi	Westerly Dispatch Center	Avg 1400 calls	158 217 229	Hope-Valley Ambulance	Hope-Valley Ambulance
Scituate - Hope-Jackson	1924	10,433 over 55 sq mi	Scituate PD	417 462 501	675 717 936	Hope-Jackson FD	Hope-Jackson FD
Scituate - North Scituate	1928	10,433 over 55 sq mi	Scituate PD	# # 756	# # 1020	North Scituate FD	North Scituate FD
Scituate Potterville	1948	10,433 over 55 sq mi	Scituate PD	63 # 66	189 # 163	Potterville FD	Potterville FD
Scituate Chopmist Hill	1950	10,433 over 55 sq mi	Scituate PD	# 167 184	# 315 391	Chopmist Hill FD	Chopmist Hill FD
South Kingstown - Kingston Fire District	1923	5,000 over 3 sq mi	South Kingstown PD	2930 3034 3112	619 594 547	South Kingstown EMS	South Kingstown EMS
South Kingstown - Union Fire District	1883	30,000 over 57 sq mi	South Kingstown PD		942 866 1076	South Kingstown EMS	South Kingstown EMS
Warren	1802	10,542 over 8.7 sq mi	Warren PD	1932 2181 2090	2658 2813 2776	Warren FD	Warren FD
W. Greenwich Hianloland Lake Mishnock W. Greenwich	1940 1951 1945	6,105 over 50.6 sq mi	West Greenwich PD	539 1053 1106	1002 1312 1344	West Greenwich Rescue	West Greenwich Rescue
Westerly – Dunn’s Corner Fire District	1942	9,000 over 22 sq mi	Westerly Dispatch Center	6002 6400 7164	795 790 899	Westerly Ambulance	Westerly Ambulance
Westerly – Misquamicut Fire District	1915	1,200 over 3.5 sq mi	Westerly Dispatch Center		154 139 116	Westerly Ambulance	Westerly Ambulance
Westerly – Watch Hill Fire District	1902	??? over 1.5 sq mi	Westerly Dispatch Center		128 124 169	Westerly Ambulance	Westerly Ambulance
Westerly – Westerly Fire District	1870	15,000 over 7.5 sq mi	Westerly Dispatch Center		646 520 712	Westerly Ambulance	Westerly Ambulance

Appendix A - EMS and Fire Emergency Calls across New England

Using information from the State Fire Marshal Office Annual Reports for Vermont, Maine, and Massachusetts; and NFIRS for Connecticut and New Hampshire, we can look at the number of municipal fire and EMS calls to determine if any trends can be observed. Since all the data (including that in the FMO Annual Report) is taken from NFIRS, it is dependent on the number of fire departments entering their data into the system and there is not 100% compliance.

New England State	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	5yr Avg
Connecticut								
Muni EMS calls	185,832	205,487	185,890	203,422	222,609	225,621	245,978	214,835
Fire calls	11,997	13,069	11,956	11,740	11,884	11,584	11,710	11,991
Non-fire calls	108,047	113,139	106,845	107,797	113,860	121,262	141,532	117,406
Total Muni Calls	305,876	331,695	304,691	322,959	348,353	358,467	399,220	344,231
% Muni EMS calls	60.8%	62.0%	61.0%	63.0%	63.9%	62.9%	61.6%	62.4%
% Muni Fire Calls	3.9%	3.9%	3.9%	3.6%	3.4%	3.2%	2.9%	3.5%
Maine								
Muni EMS calls	65,060	66,293	76,138	81,947	81,846	70,410	91,065	77,950
Fire calls	5,422	5,261	5,556	5,749	6,422	5,623	6,459	5,845
Non-fire calls	29,547	30,535	35,451	34,262	35,998	35,987	40,148	35,397
Total Muni Calls	100,029	102,089	117,145	121,958	124,266	112,020	137,672	119,192
% Muni EMS calls	65.0%	64.9%	65.0%	67.2%	65.9%	62.9%	66.1%	65.4%
% Muni Fire Calls	5.4%	5.2%	4.7%	4.7%	5.2%	5.0%	4.7%	4.9%
New Hampshire								
Muni EMS calls	82,456	87,534	99,124	98,746	111,147	114,796	111,089	103,739
Fire Calls	6,397	6,071	5,844	6,793	7,375	4,121	5,267	5,912
Non-fire calls	49,302	52,407	58,378	55,260	58,261	59,607	59,678	57,265
Total Muni Calls	138,155	146,012	163,346	160,799	176,783	178,524	176,034	166,916
% Muni EMS calls	59.7%	59.9%	60.7%	61.4%	62.9%	64.3%	63.1%	62.2%
% Muni Fire Calls	4.6%	4.2%	3.6%	4.2%	4.2%	2.3%	3.0%	3.5%
Vermont								
Muni EMS calls	21,396	22,225	22,513	23,535	23,208	21,295	25,012	22,965
Fire Calls	3,031	4,076	5,431	3,575	3,269	2,458	2,660	3,578
Non-fire calls	18,702	20,119	16,332	16,332	16,332	17,011	18,199	17,388
Total Muni Calls	45,677	46,420	45,569	45,763	44,085	40,764	45,871	44,745
% Muni EMS calls	46.8%	47.9%	49.4%	51.4%	52.6%	52.2%	54.5%	51.3%
% Muni Fire Calls	6.6%	8.8%	11.9%	7.8%	7.4%	6.0%	5.8%	8.0%
Massachusetts								
Muni EMS calls	442,310	443,486	472,447	510,956	525,726	561,350		492,713
Fire calls	31,229	29,828	28,989	31,302	31,889	27,895		30,189
Non-fire calls	285,297	298,686	306,611	327,928	328,719	347,026		315,711
Total Muni Calls	758,836	772,000	808,047	870,186	886,334	936,271		838,612
% Muni EMS calls	58.3%	57.4%	58.5%	58.7%	59.3%	60.0%		58.8%
% Muni Fire Calls	4.1%	3.9%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.0%		3.6%
Rhode Island								
Muni EMS calls	133,038	133,709	134,126	143,614	179,215	120,883	130,252	136,122
Total Muni Calls	158,493	159,510	159,159	171,039	205,234	148,725	154,507	162,050
% Muni EMS calls	83.9%	83.8%	84.3%	84.0%	87.3%	81.3%	84.3%	84.0%
% Muni Fire Calls	16.1%	16.2%	15.7%	16.0%	12.7%	18.7%	15.7%	16.0%

Fire and Emergency Medical Services in Rhode Island

In looking at Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, the percentage of fire and EMS calls relative to the total calls are similar. Of the non-fire calls, false alarms and service calls account for between 25% and 30% of the total emergency calls for the five States in the table above.

- Maine's percentage of fire and EMS calls relative to the total calls are higher than these three States. This may be partly due to the fact that slightly less than half the fire departments report incident data.
- Vermont's percentage of fire calls is higher and the percentage of EMS calls is lower relative to the total calls. The lower EMS percentage may be due to Vermont's reliance on non-profits for ambulance service (although many towns have a first responder squad) and its higher fire call percentage may be due to its small population and smaller density (population per square mile).