



Fire District 4

FIRE & RESCUE

Serving North Spokane County

315 E Crawford St.
Deer Park, WA 99006
509-467-4500
www.scf4.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: January 25, 2024 edited *March 28, 2024*
Contact: Fire Chief Bill Neckels | billn@scfd4.org | 509-467-4500

Spokane County Fire District 4 adopts 2024 budget

"We operate under a balanced budget to fund emergency services," fire chief says

Deer Park, Wash. – Spokane County Fire District 4 adopted its 2024 budget. The fire district operates under a balanced budget and its funding decisions are guided by a strategic plan, which identifies the operational and capital needs to provide fire and EMS to the community.

The strategic plan is approved by the Board of Fire Commissioners who are locally elected to represent the community's priorities. All board meetings are open to the public and meeting information can be found on the fire district's website.

In addition to operating under a balanced budget, Fire District 4 has passed all financial and accountability audits by the state.

"Transparency and accountability are key to maintaining public trust," Fire Chief Bill Neckels said. "We work for you and believe it is critical for our community to understand how we are funded. This is a partnership to save lives and property and we're grateful for the community's support."

How we fund emergency services

Fire District 4 is funded through two property tax levies. The fire levy is capped at \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The EMS levy is capped at \$0.50 per \$1,000. The fire levy accounts for 70 percent of the district's revenue and supplements the EMS program, which accounts for 72 percent of all calls. The EMS levy makes up the remaining 30 percent of district revenue.

In 2021, voters approved a fire levy rate of \$1.50. Since then, the rate has dropped to \$1.16.

Why did the levy rate drop?

State law limits fire districts to a 1 percent revenue increase per year. This means fire levy rates fall as property values rise to limit fire districts to approximately the same amount of revenue each year plus the 1 percent increase allowed by state law.

New homes and businesses improve the local economy, but the increased property values drive down the levy rate further. This creates a greater demand for services and increases costs to provide those services.

This is called "levy erosion" and impacts a fire district's ability to provide emergency services.

"There is a common misconception that revenue for the fire district increases annually by the same percentage as assessed property values. That is not the case," Chief Neckels said. "We are limited to just a 1 percent increase per year."

Calls for emergency services are up 24 percent in three years

Call volumes have increased 24 percent in the last three years due to population and residential and commercial growth. Fire District 4 responds to an average of 4,200 calls each year, of which 72 percent are for EMS. More calls mean additional costs, and those costs are higher due to inflation. Costs to deliver emergency services increase by an average of 7.5 percent each year, but the fire district is limited to just an annual 1 percent revenue increase.

The 1 percent increase is not keeping up with the emergency service needs of the community. Fire District 4 is considering asking voters to reset the fire levy rate to \$1.50 in the August 2024 primary election.

The \$0.34 levy lid lift would restore the levy to \$1.50 and fund additional fire/EMS personnel to respond to higher call volumes, add a fire engine/ladder used for structural fire suppression, and replace three “urban interface engines” used for both structural and wildfire suppression. It would also fund the remodel of Station 47 (Green Bluff) to accommodate personnel and seasonal firefighters during wildland fire season to reduce response times.

A final decision will be made before the Board of Fire Commissioners during a public meeting later this year.

Learn more at www.scf4.org. Fire Chief Bill Neckels also welcomes your questions at 509-467-4500 or billn@scfd4.org.

###

Spokane County Fire District 4 provides fire and life safety services to approximately 40,000 people over 330 square miles in north Spokane County, including the city of Deer Park. The fire district responds to an average of 4,200 calls each year – of which 72 percent are for emergency medical service (EMS). Call volumes have increased 24 percent in the last three years (2020- 2023). The district’s emergency personnel are highly trained to provide services for fire suppression and prevention, wildland firefighting, EMS and ambulance transport, vehicle accidents and extrication, hazardous material spills, and life safety programs. The district also is a fully qualified fire prevention bureau, providing commercial life safety inspections, construction plan review, public education, wildfire home ignition zone assessments, and fire investigations. Fire District 4 operates under a balanced budget and has passed all financial and accountability audits by the state.