

# THE SIMSBURY VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY

## 871 HOPMEADOW STREET SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT 06070

James A. Baldis  
Chief of Department



(860) 658-1971  
(860) 658-5611

### ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FIRE CHIEF MAY 14, 2012

For the past six years I have had the distinct pleasure of reporting on the readiness of the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company to meet the emergency demands of the town. The dedication of the membership to attend countless hours of training, ensure the equipment is tested, maintained and ready for immediate use, and the hours required to respond to the calls for help came to the ultimate test this year with a record breaking 994 emergency calls.

Weather was the largest contributor to the events that challenged our readiness. A record breaking winter snow fall which resulted in numerous calls from concerned citizens with overloaded roof tops, fire hydrants that were buried for months, and challenges in getting to emergencies due to narrow streets, high snow banks and waist deep snow which made for a treacherous winter. This was followed by a very wet spring and with it came flood waters and numerous calls for assistance for flooded basements. Low lying area adjacent to the Farmington River became isolated by the flooding which resulted in having to change our designated response to emergencies to protect the east side of the river. The wet spring was followed by summer thunderstorms which were not only violent but spawned tornadoes as close as Westfield, Massachusetts. These storms caused numerous calls for wires and trees down, a few of which caused significant damage to area homes and made streets impassible. As summer came to a close the weather challenges did not. A late September hurricane Irene visited Connecticut with tropical force winds and heavy rain. Winds caused more tree and power line

problems, and the rains produced flooding conditions which prompted us to staff all stations during the storm and to relocate an engine and crew on the east side of the Farmington River due to flooding which closed rte 185 for a period of time. The year of the weather events were not over however. Storm Albert, a freak late October snow storm dumped upwards of 20 inches of snow on the Town of Simsbury and left in its wake a level of destruction never seen by many residents. Roads were impassible in many areas, all emergency services in town were faced with ever increasing danger as trees, limbs and power lines fell in the darkness. Hundreds of calls for advice or assistance were handled by both Police and Fire Department dispatchers with added staff to both areas. With the extent of damage throughout town and the lack of electricity which increases the potential for fires and other emergencies, all firehouses were staffed 24 hours a day for the week following the storm with volunteer firefighters and officers to ensure immediate and rapid responses to emergencies.

All of these events combined to give our firefighters a 40% increase in emergency calls over our annual average. These additional calls alone equate to over 12,000 hours of additional response time at no labor cost to the community. And these hours do not take into account the station stand-by time given by our volunteer membership to ensure the protection of the town.

But it's not just the cost savings. Each hour spent on a response is backed by hours of training, dedication at all hours of the day and night to help a neighbor in need, hours spent away from family and friends, or hours away from work. Not for a paycheck at the end of the day but for a pat on the back, a thank you that emerges from the stresses of an emergency, a handshake of gratitude from a resident whose loved one has been brought to safety, or just the knowledge that their effort made a positive difference for someone who is having a bad day. To the men and women who are the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company, I thank you for your dedication and resolve to continue your service to our community.

To the Fire District and the Taxpayers of the Town of Simsbury, your investment into our infrastructure over the past number of years especially the recent rebuilding of The Main Station complex allowed us to sustain our operations at 100% effectiveness throughout these severe events. During the two major storms this fall, our Fire Department dispatch center served as a back up to the Police Department's dispatch center when power issues with the generator at the Town Hall resulted in dispatch system failures and forced the Police to relocate to the Main Station temporarily. Even the town's Emergency Operation Center was also poised to move to the Main Station when there was uncertainty about the electrical service to the EOC during the storm. In addition all outlying stations were fully operational and provided not only shelter for our firefighters but was a welcomed safe haven for Police, Ambulance, and Public Work staff during these storms.

As mentioned earlier we answered 994 calls for help where we responded to a wide variety of fire and rescue emergencies. Our commitment to excellence continues with aggressive training requirements which include regular Monday night drills, additional drill scheduled during the year on improving medical care and knowledge, rapid rescue response teams, technical rope training, swift and cold water rescue training and confined space rescue training. In addition we have expanded our multi agency training to include the Simsbury Volunteer Ambulance Association, the Capital Region Haz Mat team and the Farmington Valley response Task Force. Our new members attend off site training to obtain Firefighter 1 certification. Many others attend additional classes at the CT Fire Academy in Windsor Locks and other locations to obtain specialized training in operations and equipment. This training produces results. Our responses are quick, focused and by using the proper techniques result in minimizing loss of life and property.

Our Junior Firefighter program which is offered to Simsbury teens from the ages of 15 to 18 continues its success with a full complement of 20 members. Through this Simsbury High School accredited program we instill the value of volunteering to the community, teach fundamental firefighting support skills and

fire behavior theory which will help them to fully participate as a firefighter when they turn 18. This program has a proven history of being the foundation for the continued success in maintaining a strong regular membership. In addition we support our members continued education through our academic leave program which allows firefighters who are attending school to continue their membership and training when they are available.

Our focus to our equipment readiness continues with regular weekly checks by our apparatus engineers and the regular support of the Fire Districts full time mechanic. This past year we were successful in the in house repair of the propulsion system of our emergency rescue boat. This saved thousand of dollars in repair or possible replacement costs. Our apparatus replacement committee followed through with the bid process, and construction of our new Engine 7 which replaced our aging Engine 13. The truck was delivered on time and within budget.

The commitment to the community by the Fire Company remained strong despite the extraordinary number of emergency calls this year. We continue to support the annual Simsbury Celebrates event by hosting the Torchlight Fire Truck Parade which turned out records crowds this year. We participated in the June High School Graduation Ceremony by providing a full dress color guard all of whom were alumni of the high school. In remembrance of the 10year anniversary of the attacks of 9/11 we organized a town wide multi-agency event which was held at the Main Station and included the unveiling of a piece of steel beam from the twin towers in a specially designed and locally produced display stand. (This archive remains on display in the Main Station's main lobby.) We hosted the national Pink Fire Truck tour which promotes cancer awareness to the community. We also continued the funding of the Lt Richard Kelleher Memorial Scholarship which is administered by the high school. This past year The Ladies Auxiliary also funded the Bowman-Kerr college scholarship in recognition of two long standing members of the auxiliary.

I would like to add to my report this year some information about the Ladies Auxiliary who has been a key support group of the volunteer firefighters. In the past few years this group within the fire company has grown to a membership of 32 strong and has become an increasing strong contributor to serving the community's needs. This year the auxiliaries fund raising efforts helped to support the burn bear and burn camp programs. They also were key contributors to the success of the week long Storm Shelter at the high school which served thousands of meals following this past October's storm.

In closing, I thank the officers, firefighters and juniors members for the hard work, dedication and professionalism they continue to give me, the Fire District and the community. I wish to acknowledge and thank the employees of the Simsbury Fire District for the outstanding level of support given to the Fire Company through the Fire Marshall's Office, professional dispatching services, and maintenance of our fleet and facilities. I thank the Officers of the Fire District and The District Commissioners for volunteering their time and for their continued support and commitment to ensure we are well equipped with the necessary resources to properly respond to emergencies and to do it safely. And finally a thank you to the tax payers, who's continued financial commitment make possible the level of emergency service that is considered one of the best in the state.

Respectfully,

James A. Baldis, Chief of Department