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January  
2024

A Semi-Annual Insight Into New Hampshire's Fire & EMS Workforce

# Recruitment & Retention News



new program >>>

## "On My Time"

New Hampshire Fire Standards and Training & EMS is excited to announce the launch of the "On My Time" Firefighter I and II training program. The program is designed for students who wish to acquire the training needed to be eligible to test for their Firefighter I and/or II certification but may not have the time to be able to attend a traditionally scheduled training program. This program allows students to complete the online training requirements at their own pace and then coordinate with a State Fire Instructor to teach them the skills portions of the module using the standard evolutions outlined in the Firefighter I/II 2019 edition of the curriculum. There is no cost associated with the online portion of the program and fire department affiliation is not required.

## What's Been Happening Developments

*The past six months have been extremely busy. Here is an update on projects addressing New Hampshire's Fire and EMS recruitment and retention barriers.*

Several Recruitment & Retention classes have taken place to provide information to department leaders on various subjects including re-energizing staff, LOSAP, grant writing, how to build community support, physical training for women, and mentorship. One of the highlights of 2023 was in October when the International Association of Fire Chiefs Volunteer Workforce Solutions came to Concord to deliver a

employee retention survey template. You can access these documents and other resources at <https://www.nh.gov/safety/divisions/fstems/RecruitmentandRetention.html>.

*A special thank you goes out to Twin State, North Country, Lakes Region and Kearsarge Mutual Aid groups, New Hampton, Litchfield, Lee, New Boston, Action Ambulance, Jefferson, and Littleton Regional Hospital for sharing with me your recruitment and retention concerns and strategies.*

Five Candidate Physical Ability Tests (CPAT) were held in New Hampshire in April, May, June, September and November. Thirty-nine (39) candidates passed in April, twenty-three (23) candidates passed in May, fifty (50) candidates passed in June, thirty-nine (39) candidates

passed in September, and forty (40) more candidates passed in November. That added one hundred and ninety-one (191) additional candidates to New Hampshire's State list for 2023. One hundred eighty-one (181) were males and ten (10) were females. New Hampshire plans to hold more CPAT dates in 2024 to allow for more opportunities for candidates to meet the pre-hiring requirement.

two-day presentation on their Recruitment & Retention Coordinator Certificate Course. Departments from across the State attended. Several templates and tools have been developed and uploaded to our website to help guide Fire and EMS leaders in the right direction of recruitment and retention. Some forms include exit interview questions, career must haves, how to host an open house, ride along form, a social media guide, and a



MESSAGES

now

### "On My Time"

To access online courses visit  
[www.nhfaemslearning.org](http://www.nhfaemslearning.org)

staffing >>>

# Semi-Annual Staffing Questionnaire Results



In July a recruitment & retention semi-annual staffing questionnaire was sent to all NH fire departments and EMS units to gauge the previous six (6) months.



## Recruited

According to answers received, at least 241 firefighters and at least 145 EMS providers were hired in the past 6 months. Note: This includes lateral transfers.

## Still Needed

At least **343 firefighters** and at least **277 EMS providers** are still needed according to those departments that responded. That is a **decrease** of 11.1% of firefighter vacancies, and 5.7% **increase** of EMS providers vacancies from last January's numbers.

The more answers provided will reflect better data. Please take a few minutes to answer the latest questionnaire.

## Survey Takers

102 fire departments and 15 EMS units answered the questionnaire for a total of 117 organizations. The more answers received the better we can gauge progress and what areas remain troublesome.

## Not Retained

According to answers received, at least 179 firefighters and at least 91 EMS providers left organizations in the past 6 months.

grant awarded >>>

## Candia & Deerfield



FEMA awarded Candia and Deerfield **\$690,562** for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant. The grant will provide these towns **with funding to help recruit more call and volunteer firefighters**. Their goal is to hire twelve (12) call fire fighters at each department over the next three (3) years. **Each new recruit will be paid \$15 per hour to attend all Firefighter I & II and Emergency Medical Response (EMR) trainings**. The grant will also help fund rental gear, social media advertising, physicals, and even a new website to share files, emails, and calendars.

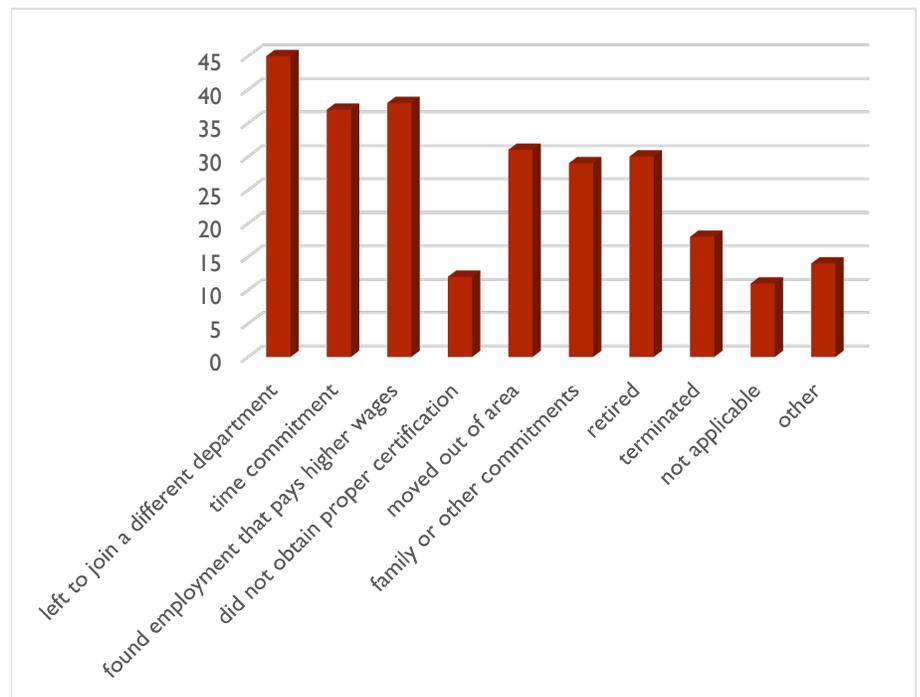
Grant Writer Jeff Labrie recommends that if you are thinking of applying for the SAFER grant that you start gathering your department's financial data and staffing stats now! For more information on grant writing tips contact Jeff Labrie at [Labrie85@gmail.com](mailto:Labrie85@gmail.com).

To apply for the SAFER grant visit <https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighters/safer>.

## Retention Questionnaire

The chart below illustrates the answers given by 102 fire departments and 15 EMS units in the semi-annual staffing questionnaire in July.

The question asked department leaders for the reason **why their Firefighters or EMS Providers left** their organizations within the past six (6) months.





## EMS Providers

As of December 1, 2023, the total number of active EMS Providers is 5,842. Below is the breakdown by license level.

Emergency Medical Technicians: 2,763

Advanced Emergency Medical Technicians: 1,483

Paramedics: 1,355

Emergency Medical Responders: 230

NH EMT – Basics: 10

Apprentice: 1

## Firefighters

As of December 1, 2023, the total number of Firefighters is 4,666. Below is the breakdown.

Firefighter I Certified: 3,733

Firefighter II Certified: 2,943

NOTE: Many Firefighters perform dual roles as EMS Providers.

Source: ImageTrend RespondNH



### Did you know?

There are at least 303 Military Veterans who are Firefighters and/or EMS Providers in New Hampshire.

Source: Survey conducted in 2023

live-in program >>>

## Emergency Services Live-In Program

Lakes Region Community College offers an opportunity for students to gain real-life experience. Here is a current list of LRCC's participating communities:

- Alton Fire & Rescue
- Belmont Fire Department
- Bristol Fire Department
- Chichester Fire Rescue
- Farmington Fire Rescue
- Gilmanton Fire Department
- Meredith Fire Department
- Plymouth Fire-Rescue
- Tilton-Northfield Fire Department

For information on how to become a live-in program site contact Nick Mercuri at [nmercuri@ccsnh.edu](mailto:nmercuri@ccsnh.edu) or call (603) 366-5326.



# Stark Volunteer Fire Department



## Using Technology to Entice Recruits



Fire Chief Charles Nesbitt of Stark Volunteer Fire Department can proudly say that his 11 members are very actively involved.

Stark is a quaint, picturesque town in northern New Hampshire with a population of around 500 people and a small fire budget to match. The median age of its residents is 57.7 years. These obstacles have not discouraged Chief Nesbitt from recruiting new members.

Chief Nesbitt contributes a few different things to SVFD's recent recruitment success, one of them being their **active social media presence**, particularly Facebook, which has helped build a buzz within their community. They also began focusing their efforts on providing great training opportunities in-house using new and modern equipment. **Incorporating technology** into their dispatch

and response has made a big difference. SVFD is the first North Country fire department to integrate Scott 3m Bluetooth

**Younger people seem to embrace new technology and feel safer with the newer tools in their arsenal, and as technology evolves, Stark plans to remain at the forefront in northern New Hampshire.**

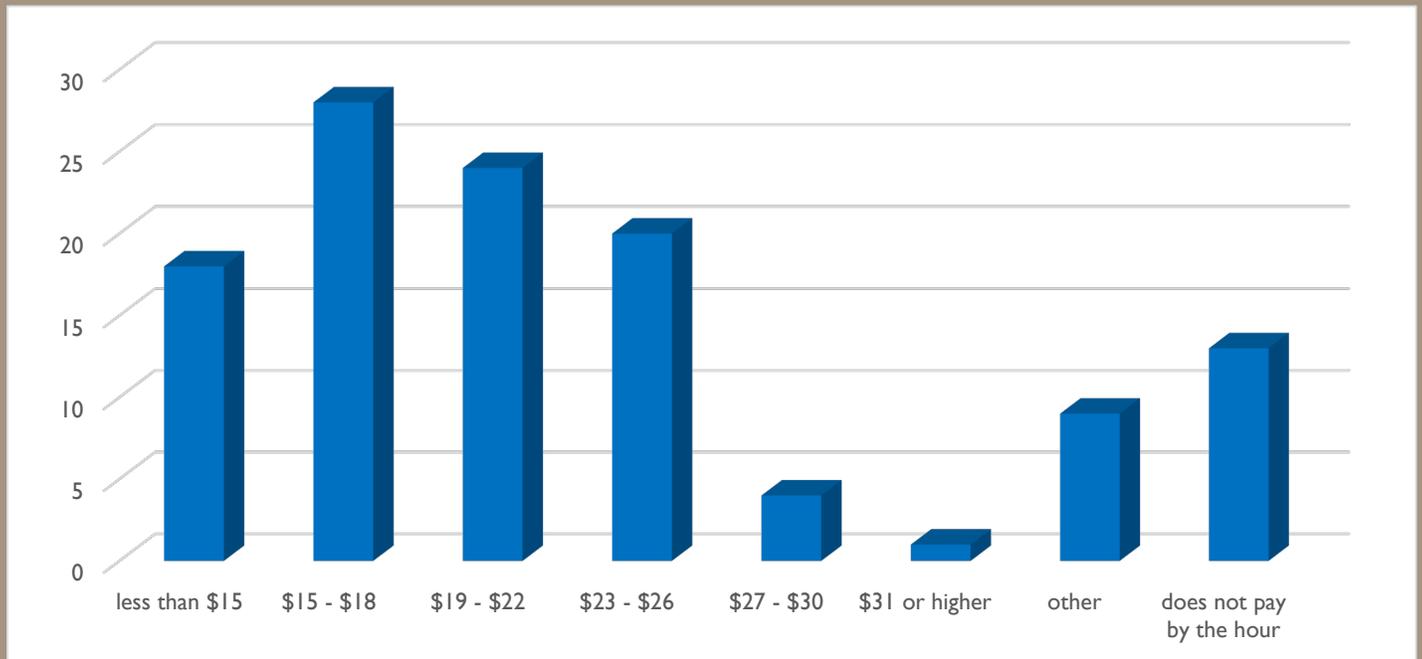
Facemasks with bone conduction headsets into their personal protective equipment (PPE). They now receive alerts on their mobile phones when any neighboring town gets toned out. Chief Nesbitt also encourages members to celebrate and take pride at

trainings and calls by allowing them to take pictures of their apparatus, tools, and even some incidents depending on the call (so long as they ensure privacy and safety first), and to showcase their comradery.

And lastly, **online training has been a huge incentive** by offering members certifications on their own time with the ability to study from mobile devices.

wages >>>

## How New Hampshire Fire Departments and EMS Units Pay New Hires



The chart reflects answers provided by 102 fire departments and 15 EMS units.

In July a recruitment & retention semi-annual staffing questionnaire was sent to all NH fire departments and EMS units to gauge the previous six (6) months.



retention >>>

## Jefferson Fire-Rescue

### How Flexibility Has Helped Retain Members



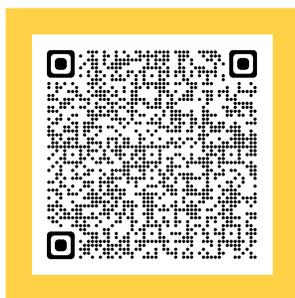
Near the center of town, just east of Santa's Village theme park, sits Jefferson Fire Department, a paid/call department mixed of fire and EMS personnel which averages around 100 calls a year, with its unique cartoon characters on its apparatus. Chief Chris Milligan can proudly say that turnover has been very low for a number of years. He is **flexible with members if they prefer fire over EMS** or vice versa and gives a pay increase to those who complete level certification courses in firefighting and EMS. And while attendance at meetings and trainings is strongly



encouraged, Chief Milligan **does not berate** those who cannot attend. Flexibility has helped create an easier work environment. And finally, Jefferson's residents and Board of Selectmen have been very supportive of its fire department due to the Chief's and the department's **transparency with the community.**

resource

7 factors that affect firefighter retention – and how to fix them



[7 factors that affect firefighter retention – and how to fix them \(firerescue1.com\)](http://firerescue1.com)

hint >>>

## Key Elements to Include in a Job Ad



You can find this and other tools and templates on our website at

<https://www.nh.gov/safety/divisions/fstems/RecruitmentandRetention.html>



### Overcoming the Social Norm with a Youthful Department

Twenty-nine-year-old Sam Clarke has been Chief of Wilmot Volunteer Fire Department since 2020 and has managed to bring modern ideas to the table to recruit new members. Chief Clarke is trying to **change the traditional idea that leaders need to be older in order to be good**. And while his department all know and respect the chain of command, **no job is beneath anyone** to do. They have a mutual respect for each other regardless of rank and work together as a team to get the job done in the most productive way. Wilmot's department culture has shifted in the right direction.

## Lee Fire & Rescue

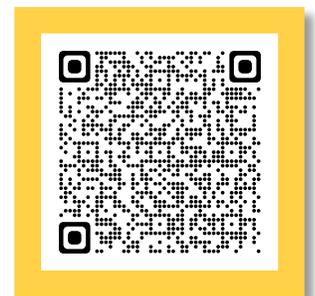


Positive changes are being made at Lee Fire & Rescue. When Chief Scott Nemet saw that part-time members were leaving for larger full-time departments in surrounding communities, he took action. He reached out to the members who left and **wanted to know what could be done to keep others from leaving**. Their answers revealed they preferred a better schedule and step increases. Chief Nemet listened and changed the schedule to 1 on 2 off, 1 on 4 off. He also got his staff a step program and continues to push for more. Upgrades to the firehouse were also made to include new bunkrooms, new lounge, and a huge gym. This proves that conducting both **stay and exit interviews are effective for retention**.



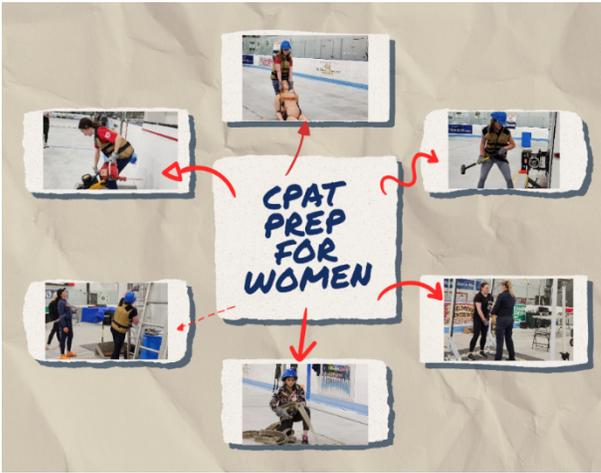
## resource

### A New Era for Firefighter Recruitment



<https://www.firehouse.com/careers-education/article/21293619/a-new-era-for-firefighter-recruitment>

## mentorship >>>



June's Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) Prep for Women class had outstanding group of volunteer mentors representing fire departments from the Seacoast area, Capital area, Lakes Region and beyond. Fire Training Captain Rosemarie Cataldo of Hartford, CT Fire has been invaluable not only with sharing her expertise with CPAT but also with uplifting New Hampshire's aspiring female firefighters. The class was led by Lieutenant Cassie Chamberlain of Portsmouth Fire Department.

## tips >>>

*Times have changed and so should your hiring process: Consider conducting your initial screening interviews online to reach up to 7 times the number of candidates.*

*Prospects want to know what it's really like to work for your organization. Use social media to give them a behind-the-scenes look at your organization.*

*Trust and effective communication are at the heart of maintaining a positive work culture.*



# Other Factors Could Be Hindering Recruitment & Retention Improvement Efforts

## Circumstances Beyond Ones Control

New Hampshire fire departments and ambulance services can do everything right in terms of recruitment and retention, but may

still find it nearly impossible to find new recruits. There are a few reasons that could be contributing to their struggles. According to the New Hampshire Economic and Labor Market Information Bureau's Economic Conditions Report [ec-0623.pdf \(nh.gov\)](#), during the third quarter of 2019

and 2022, there was a slight decrease in the percentage of prime working age workers (aged 25 to 54) from 57.5% to 57.3%. A decrease from 11.7% to 11.0% was observed in the group of workers aged 19 to 24. For residents aged 25 to 34, the labor force participation rate fell by four percentage points. Individuals engaging in self-employment versus traditional employment likely attributed to the workforce shortage.

Another economic condition that New Hampshire's emergency leaders have no control over is the State's high cost of living.

Changes to New Hampshire's workforce suggest there is a shrinking pool of talent. It will likely continue to impede the progress of finding more first responders.

Information found in the SoFi article [Cost of Living in New Hampshire \(2023\) | SoFi](#) gives the average cost of living in New Hampshire as \$56,727 per year. According to U.S. News & World Report's Affordability Rankings, which compare a state's average cost of living

to the average household income in that state, New Hampshire ranks 36 [Rankings: Affordability - Cost of Living by State \(usnews.com\)](#). Firefighters and EMS Providers would need to make a minimum of \$69,920 per year in order to afford a single-family home in New Hampshire according to [The Salary You Need To Afford Rent in Every State | GOBankingRates](#).

## high schools >>>

In October all New Hampshire public high schools were asked to share the message (to the right) with their seniors as a reminder that not all careers require college degrees.

While it is undeniable that for decades, universities and colleges were the preferred higher education institutions, in today's labor market, mindsets are shifting. Due to the fact that trade schools are currently more financially feasible, more young people are choosing them over degree programs. Trade school curricula emphasize practical, hands-on knowledge and experience so that graduates are prepared for the workforce right away. We hope that we see an influx of students in the next few years.

Source: Berkley, B. (2023). Degrees of separation: As college enrollment drops, trade school sign-ups rise. The Hustle. <https://thehustle.co/04242023-trade-school-enrollment/>

*Pictured are high school graduates from the Class of 2022, Noah Brent of Weare Fire Department and Louise Bishop of Derry Fire Department. Both of whom chose the N.H. Fire Academy as their source of post-secondary education to pursue their dream of becoming career firefighters. Both are currently attending Granite State EMS to get their Advanced EMT.*



<https://nhfa-ems.com/>

# not all careers require a college degree

Contact N.H. Fire Academy & EMS today to learn about fast and free training opportunities so you can kickstart your career as a Firefighter or EMS Provider after graduation.

Call (603) 223-4384 or email [fstems@dos.nh.gov](mailto:fstems@dos.nh.gov)

## time warp >>> 1968

### Public Forum

## Problems in Hiring Firefighters

To the Editor:

Honorable Mayor, Manager Violette, City Council Members and Citizens of Portsmouth, New Hampshire—

We, the members of Local 1313 International Association of Firefighters feel the necessity of informing you of the feelings this local has in the hiring of new men.

Recently, the city had an examination for the purpose of hiring five new men. Fifteen men sought applications to this position, but only three took the examination. Why would fifteen men seek applications and only three take the exam?

It is our contention that upon looking into the duties of a firefighter this man finds;

1. He must work 63 hours a week, being away from his family three nights a week.

2. He has the enduring responsibility of saving human life through fire and ambulance work, with the possibility of losing his own life and bringing home some dreaded disease to

his family while on ambulance duty.

3. He has to have the ability to handle all fire apparatus, firefighting equipment, ambulance equipment and the hydraulics of a ladder truck.

4. He must not only master their usage, but must be able to instantly recognize the scores of emergency conditions which call for his special application.

With this brief outline of what is expected of a new man, the starting salary is only \$4,600.00. Gentlemen, under the conditions of firefighting, where we depend on one another, we feel that with a pay that is not even liveable, in this day and age, that we will not get qualified men, if any at all.

Other than clerks and stenographers, the fire department and the police department are the only ones required to take an examination. This examination is to serve a purpose of getting the best qualified men. When you can't even get men to take the examination, you

are eventually going to have problems.

In closing we must remind you of the ever increasing problems towns and cities are having hiring men in blue, and hope we never have to resort to a second-rate fire department. "Remember the men you hire may someday be serving you or your family."

Thank you.

JOHN BENJAMIN  
Local 1313 International  
Association of Firefighters  
John Benjamin, President

P.S. This was not a letter of request to the City Council. It's sole purpose is to inform them and the citizens of Portsmouth the situation that arose in the last two months. — J.B.

# final thoughts...

A special thank you goes out to this group of Veterans for their help with Kevlar to Leather: Bridging the Gap to Continued Service. The event sparked new friendships, connections, resources and interest in emergency services.



**JOE BOUCHER**  
Manchester FD



**TOM HOLLIDAY**  
Manchester FD



**CHRIS MCMURRAY**  
Hooksett FD



**CJ GOSSELEIN**  
Claremont FD



**LEE GAUDETTE**  
Manchester FD

*thank you!*



**NICK GENTHNER**  
Manchester FD



**KYLE SALTONMARSH**  
Stratham FD



**WALTER TRACHIM**  
Trinity EMS



**JOE LACARBONARA**  
Salem FD



**KENNY SMITH**  
Claremont FD



**important >>>**

## Recruitment and Retention Initiative for Members

The State of New Hampshire has made funding available to support the recruitment, career development, and retention of emergency response personnel. Any member employed by a New Hampshire fire department, or a graduate of the New Hampshire fire academy who becomes employed, is eligible to receive full reimbursement for the cost of the academy not covered by other funding sources. The entity that paid for the cost is also eligible for reimbursement. Students must have their employer's approval. To be eligible for this program a student must be a current full-time career, part-time, on-call or volunteer member who has successfully completed a program and obtained certification in the approved courses. Courses completed after July 1st, 2023, are eligible for reimbursement under this program. Please contact the Division of Fire Standards and Training and EMS with any questions.

**upcoming R&R classes >>>**

**don't miss out!**

- Jan. 10 – WorkInvest EMT Training Program @ FSTEMS
- Jan. 22 – Boost Your SAFER Grant Writing for Recruitment & Retention @ FSTEMS
- Feb. 4 – CPAT Prep for Women @ FSTEMS
- Feb. 6 – Standing Out in An Oral Board: Helping Applicants Succeed @ FSTEMS
- Feb. 13 – Wage & Hour Laws Bootcamp @ FSTEMS

## Please Reach Out

If you have a recent success story with recruitment or retention and would like to have it shared in a future newsletter, please let me know. Or if you would like a recruitment & retention class held in your area please call (603) 223-4384 or email [Kimberly.M.McCulloch@dos.nh.gov](mailto:Kimberly.M.McCulloch@dos.nh.gov).