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Call Volumes Increasing for North County Fire & EMS
Strategic Plan Will Address Service Level Issues

Stanwood, Wash. – North County Regional Fire Authority (North County Fire & EMS) reports that call volumes have increased 37% in the past five years. The Fire Authority is developing a Strategic Plan for how it will respond to more emergency calls due to population growth and aging.

“We want the community to know we are in front of this issue before it becomes a problem,” said Fire Chief John Cermak. “A Strategic Plan will identify ‘hot spots’ for the Fire Authority and guide our decision-making moving forward.”

Chief Cermak says that additional staffing and apparatus are required to maintain emergency response times and service levels for the community. Higher call volumes also mean added costs for items out of the Fire Authority’s control, such as equipment, fuel, maintenance, and medical supplies.

Daily operations at North County Fire & EMS are funded through two property tax levies for fire and emergency medical service (EMS). Voters approved a fire levy of \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value in 2008 and an EMS levy of 50 cents/\$1,000 in 2015. Over time, these levy rates fall as property values rise to limit the Fire Authority to roughly the same amount of revenue per year. For example, the current fire levy is \$1.36 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

The Fire Authority is limited to a one percent revenue increase per year by law, but that’s not keeping up with inflation or the demand for service. The Fire Authority has actively applied for grants, and secured additional funding for staffing and replacing firefighter breathing equipment.

“Grants are important, but they are not a sustainable way to fund fire and EMS,” said Chief Cermak. “One year, funding is available and then it’s gone when decision-makers decide there are other priorities.”

In addition to grants, North County Fire & EMS looks to regional partnerships with other emergency service providers to be more cost effective. One such partnership includes the City of Stanwood that annexed to the Fire Authority last year with voter approval. North County Fire & EMS had provided Stanwood residents with emergency services through a contract relationship for many years. Taxpayers in both jurisdictions paid the same amount. However, formalizing the partnership through annexation saved money on contract administrative costs and staff time.

The Fire Authority also is partnering with the Arlington Fire Department on programs, such as firefighter training and job sharing. This saves money for both agencies while improving emergency services.

A draft of the Strategic Plan will be available in late April. The Fire Authority will communicate how it plans to maintain emergency service levels based on data findings and recommendations.

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North County Regional Fire Authority, known as “North County Fire & EMS,” provides fire suppression and emergency medical service to 25,000 people over 110 square miles, including the City of Stanwood. More than 70 emergency personnel respond to approximately 4,200 calls per year. North County Fire & EMS is debt-free, operates under a balanced budget and has passed all its independent audits by the State.