FIRE DEPARTMENT

I am pleased to submit the following Annual Report for the calendar year 2009 for the Westminster Fire and Ambulance Departments. Proudly serving the citizens of the town of Westminster for 184 years. Chief Brenton W. MacAloney



The Fire Department annual report comprises the Fire Department and the Ambulance Department reports. Since EMS has always been part of the WFD we continue to report both within the same annual report although both have different Department Budget lines.



Note: the increase in emergency responses in 2008 was due to the December Ice Storm

Department Record:

Fire:		Emergency Medical:	
Structure	7	Illness/Injury	501
Brush/Illegal	47	Motor Vehicle Accident	107
Chimney	4	Carbon Monoxide	9
Motor Vehicle	7		
Mutual Aid	63	Service Calls:	
Auto Fire Alarm	189	Public Service	38
Electrical	2	Hazardous Materials	7
Other Fires	12	Hovercraft Calls	0
		Search and Rescue	2
Investigations:		Other	58
Misc.	83		
		Total Incidents	1136

Permits and Compliance 2008:

Burning Permits	801 (3268 Activations)
Smoke / CO Detector Insp.	106
Oil Burner Permits	43
Blasting Permits	4
Fuel Storage	20
Plan Reviews	44
Safety Inspections	59
Fire Drills	15
Miscellaneous	20
Non-Criminal Complaint	1 (Fines issue for non compliance.)

Personnel:

Full-Time Staffing – There was no change to full-time firefighter staffing in 2009. Current full-time staffing includes 6 firefighters (4 firefighter/Paramedics, 2 Firefighter/EMT) in rotation providing on-duty coverage 24x7 with 2 firefighters except from 11:00 PM to 8:00 AM when there is only two half the time. In addition to the full-time firefighters there is a full-time Fire Captain, Chief, and Department Administrator who work weekdays.

During 2009 we moved forward with filling the remaining open shifts overnight when only one full-time firefighter was on duty with a per-diem firefighter to provide 2 firefighters on duty 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

On-Call Firefighters – Over the last year we have decreased the number of Call Firefighters by 2 due to attrition, bringing us to 16. We currently do not have any Call Firefighters in training due to budget reductions that resulted in eliminating funds to pay for hiring costs.

There are 5 Call Firefighters that are unable perform all functions including driving apparatus or operating specialized equipment due to lack of total training. This creates difficulty when responding to calls at times as we have to wait for trained firefighters to drive and operate the apparatus. Trained Call Firefighters are needed to assist when we require more than the two onduty firefighters.

Shortage of fully trained Call Firefighters continues to be our largest problem, and has been made worse by budget reductions. There is a strong need to reinstate the funding for hiring of call firefighters as we have had 3 leave during the second half of the year and we need them replaced. The shortage of Call Firefighters places a burden on the full-time firefighters which results in increased overtime costs. Less fully trained Call Firefighters also puts more requirements on the remaining Call Firefighters.

Per-Diem Firefighters: We have 6 Per-Diem firefighters who are firefighters that <u>do not live in Westminster</u> and come to work shifts for our department. The reason for these firefighters is that we do not have sufficient number of call firefighters from town to cover shifts. Per-Diem Firefighters are either full-time firefighters or call firefighters for other communities. Although Per-Diem Firefighters have a place in our department they do not respond to general calls as they live too far away to make any difference in the majority of the calls we have.

Solution to the staffing problem: During 2009 we have had 6 individuals that have expressed interest in the fire department as Call Firefighters. 2 specifically wanted to be EMTs and work on the ambulance, one was looking for full-time employment and the other was interested in being an

EMT on-call. As noted above we have a need for Call Firefighters. Our current staffing allows for 90% of all ambulance calls to be staffed with the two duty firefighters. We do not currently have a need for non-firefighters to work the ambulance based on this model.

The remaining 4 that have expressed interest in being a Call Firefighter has resulted in sending them information and only one that has expressed a strong interest in moving forward. When this one individual finally decided to move forward the Town had put a freeze on spending and subsequently reduced the FY10 budget by \$29,000. Unfortunately the reductions in the budget impacted the hiring of Call Firefighters.

The \$29,000 reduction for FY2010 was in addition to a \$20,000 reduction taken at the Annual Town Meeting when the Fire Department budget was set. The \$20,000 reduction came out of excess payroll that is typically unused and available for paying call firefighters, but with the reduction of call firefighters and the reduction in the number of calls they respond to had left an excess that could be removed without hurting the Fire Department Budget.

The \$29,000 reduction was not as easy to accomplish and required making decisions based on priority setting. First we must meet all contractual obligations, adhere to all legal requirements, maintain safety, and maintain equipment to keep our current insurance rating of 9/4. Therefore the \$29,000 was taken from items that would not impact these priorities, and resulted in cutting training in half and removing the costs associated with hiring new Call Firefighters.

Unlike previous years we have not done any public education to attract new Call Firefighter as a result of budget cuts. It is not know if funding will be restored for FY11 and if not we run a very high risk of continued attrition and therefore Call Firefighter reductions.

Residents 18 years of age and High School Students at least 16 years of age are encouraged to stop by the station and contact the Chief to learn more about becoming a Call Firefighter and review eligibility pending funding for hiring. For more detail contact the Fire Chief.

Department Training: Unfortunately we have had to reduce our training from 24 paid drills per year to 12. This is a step backwards to when we had only 12 paid trainings per year a few years ago. We had increased our training to 24 after Firefighter McNamara of Lancaster died in a fire and the Selectmen wanted to boost our training to reduce the risk of a firefighter losing their life in a fire. Although there is not an immediate impact of reducing training, the \$29,000 budget cut that resulted in cutting the training in half will eventually impact the skill level of firefighters and increase our risk for injury.

I strongly urge the town to restore training funds in future budget years.

NIMS Compliance: The Fire Department complies with the NIMS Training requirements for 2009.

Service Delivery:

The Fire Department is only here for one purpose and that is delivering services. Through 2009 budget cuts had not affected service delivery. The Fire Department budget at this point cannot incur further budget cuts without impacting services.

It is our goal to provide the best possible customer service with regard to the delivery of Emergency Medical, Fire Suppression, Hazardous Materials, Technical Rescue, Fire Investigation, Public Fire Safety Education, Fire Prevention, and Specialized Community Services. The Department is service driven and we appreciate the feedback during the year to assist us in

knowing how well we are delivering these services. Residents are encouraged to visit the station or contact the Chief of the Department at any time to inquire about the department and get answers to their questions.

Westminster ranks 329 out of 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts for the amount of squire miles we cover from one station and as the town builds out our average response times will continue to increase and with require discussions about having a sub-station on already town own land in Whitmanville.

The lack of on-call firefighters impacts our ability to deliver services. Generally this means that there is a delay in response waiting for additional on-call firefighters to arrive. This is especially true when we have multiple emergencies at one time, but budget reductions taken in FY2010 will also have an impact on hiring Call Firefighters to replace those that leave.

EMS:

Emergency Medical Services – Over the last year 54% of the Department's responses are Emergency Medical in nature. This includes responding to all 911 calls for in-house medicals as well as personal injury accidents including motor vehicle accidents, which often require the assistance of firefighters to assist and address other hazards.

We offer outgoing EMS services that include visiting critical care and special needs patients and family to preplan a medical response in the event we are called.

Our responses to medical emergencies continue to exceed industry benchmark response times for Emergency Medical Services. Our response time from the initial call to arrival on scene is at an average of 4 minutes with 2 Firefighter/EMTs.

During the year we utilize donations to purchase specialized equipment to assist the Paramedics with delivering lifesaving interventions.

The following chart shows the total number of medical response to ambulance transports since we started the ambulance service.



Ambulance Account - Ambulance receipts for services are put into a Town receipts for appropriation account where monies are expended only at a town meeting. Ambulance Receipts fully fund the additional costs of operating the ambulance service. The Ambulance Budget covers the cost for the ambulance, medical supplies for the Ambulance, Fire Department, Police Department, and First Aid Kits the Town Hall, Parks and Recreation, and Crocker Pond. A

detailed ambulance report containing statistics and finances is provided to the Selectmen on a monthly basis.

On days when we do not have a second full-time firefighter on duty a per-diem Firefighter/EMT is hired to work and is paid from the Ambulance Budget. This Firefighter/EMT provides both ambulance services and fire services during these hours.

We have been utilizing ambulance receipts to pay off the 2007 Ambulance Bond at and accelerated rate. During 2010 we will pay off the Ambulance Bond two years early. Due to the number of back to back calls having increased over the last year and not having the ambulance in service when being worked on, it is recommended that the current ambulance be kept as a back up when a new ambulance is purchased in the new few years. This will provide better service to the second emergency and prevent lost revenue. In addition, this change will be easily done as we have the Rescue set up as a Class V ambulance that can transport if a back up ambulance is available. If we keep the older ambulance we have all the equipment needed to transfer to outfit the ambulance without extensive additional costs.

ALS/Paramedics - We have been operating at the ALS/Paramedic level since the fall of 2007 to provide the highest level of patient care. There are times when our Ambulance is tied up and we have a second medical call. During these times situations we respond, but have to wait for another ambulance to arrive that takes about 12 minutes on average.

2010 will start our third year of operating at the Paramedic level. We currently have 4 full-time paramedics with one scheduled to work each shift. During our third year of operation when a full-time paramedic is not scheduled to work we will be required by the State to schedule another paramedic. Future funding for this will be paid for from ambulance receipts.

The ambulance receipts are currently paying for another full-time firefighter to obtain his Paramedic certification during 2010.

Fire Prevention, Suppression and Response:

Over the years we have seen an increase of State Laws that require the Fire Department to perform inspections. Although these additional requirements improve public safety, they do have an impact on the Fire Department staff. We have complaints from the public from time to time regarding our need to reschedule due to being tied up with an emergency. Since we do not have dedicated inspection personnel and utilize duty firefighters, we ask the public for understanding when we need to reschedule

ISO (Insurance Rating) - The Fire Department maintains an ISO Fire Insurance Rating of 4/9. The ISO rating is utilized by many insurance companies to set fire insurance rates for residents and businesses. The rating of 4 places Westminster on a par with 6.9 percent of communities across the country. Just 10.3 percent of cities and towns nationwide are rated between one and four on a ninepoint scale. Only 3.9 percent of communities in the country have a better rating than Westminster. The 4 rating is for parts of the community protected by town water and the 9 are for those sections of town that are not on the water system. There are many factors that are included in the rating including staffing levels, water flow, training, and alarm systems. We have a firefighter working with ISO to update their records of Westminster as a review during 2009 found the water supply map to be inaccurate.

Homeowners should check their insurance policy and look for the fire insurance rating and if they have questions contact the Fire Department to determine what ISO Classification area they are in.

The 4 rating on our policy provides the lowest cost for fire protection of your property in Westminster

Water Supply for sub-divisions - The Fire Department has a regulation for new sub-divisions that require fire hydrants for fire protection. If hydrants are not provided on the public water system we require underground cisterns to supply the water for firefighting the immediate area.

These cisterns meet the criteria as a fire hydrant for insurance purposes. One of our firefighters is working to assess our hydrants, dry hydrants and this cistern in order to determine what residents in the area of these water sources may qualify for the reduced rating from a 9 to a 4. We hope that this review will assist the residents in the area with reduced fire insurance cost in the future.

Fire Alarm/Monitoring – Since 2006 the Fire Department has been using a wireless Fire Alarm system to monitor buildings in town. We currently have 52 locations we monitor and in addition to monitoring Fire Alarms we also monitor burglar alarms and special alarms for town facilities. The system works very well and provides early information about where the alarm is coming from within the building when newer alarm panels are installed. This way the firefighters are better prepared before they arrive.

Hazardous Materials – The Fire Department is the Town's Hazardous Materials emergency response service and the location for Right To Know information for companies that report to the EPA. The Fire Department takes advantage of Massachusetts Law to bill for our Hazardous Materials responses and utilize the funds we receive go into a revolving account to pay for the storage, disposal, and replacement of equipment used. The efforts undertaken to control and clean up even minor spills protects the ground water, shallow wells from pollution, and protects the environment we all enjoy in Westminster.

Technical Rescue – Every year the Fire Department faces challenges with regard to rescuing the public. Although we do not supply all types of technical rescue we have focused on core rescue techniques that are most likely to affect the public. These include cold water/Ice rescue, vertical lift rescue, confined space rescue, and low angle rescue. Rescues that are outside the realm of what we offer can be obtained through mutual aid from other communities. These include dive rescue and trench rescue as examples.

Fire Investigation - The Westminster Fire Department continues to have 2 highly experienced fire investigators that ensure that all fires are investigated completely and when needed files charges against suspected arsonists. This has resulted in arrests, convictions, probation, and the reimbursement in court awarded funds to the town for costs related to the investigation of fires and explosive devices. The efforts of the fire investigators have resulted in reduced arson resulting in stolen vehicles dumped and ignited from other communities. In addition, the town has benefited from court ordered community service. Funds are returned to the Town's General Funds for inclusion in future years expenditures.

Fire Prevention - Prevention activities are a major focus for the department that not only help reduce property loss and injuries, but also includes the development of the personal interaction between the community and the fire service. The Fire Department participates in a number of town events each year to assist in meeting the goals of the department.

Fire Prevention activities in the department include residential commercial, and industrial building plan review, residential smoke and carbon monoxide detector inspections, oil burner inspections, LP storage inspections, blasting permitting, flammable storage permitting, commercial, industrial, and industrial inspections, Senior Citizen safety awareness, preschool and daycare fire education programs, and school age fire education programs.

SAFE and related programs - Westminster is a SAFE Grant participating community having received SAFE (Student Awareness for Fire Education) State Grant funds for a number of years. This program initially focused on school age children, but over the last few years other "at risk" groups such as seniors have been added as our target audience. Our primary focus continues to be preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school age children. Preschool and kindergarten children are taught fire safety at the Fire Station with video and live fire education programs with Smokey Bear at the guest visitor. We also take our "Friendly Firefighter" program on the road to preschools to introduce young children to firefighters so they know not be scared of us during an emergency when we have all our equipment on.

Our Elementary School age fire safety education is based on the SAFE Program. This is delivered to students at the Westminster Elementary and Meetinghouse School and also involves using the SAFE Trailer available from the Fire District and other classroom activities.

The State SAFE Grant has continued to be funded and these funds make it possible to deliver quality fire and general safety programs to the public and key "at risk" groups in the future without local funds. There is a population that often get missed during this training and that is home schooled children as they do not attend the main-stream educational locations we visit. Parents of home schooled children are encouraged to be in contact with us so we can notify them when we run our programs so their children can participate.

The SAFE Program is developmental in that it builds on the knowledge that is instilled in the children each consecutive year as the children participate. In later years the children generally know the basics of personal, family and home safety.

The Fire Department is a member of the Massachusetts State-Wide Coalition for Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program, and provides intervention programs for children at risk. The department has trained firefighters in evaluating children for risk potential and assisting with referral to various agencies for intervention if necessary. Residents are encouraged to contact the department if they feel they know of a child at risk.

Our senior citizens are considered an "at risk" population for injury and to address this we have continued to offer assistance through programs we offer through partnership with the Council on Aging. We also offer assistance to seniors with the installation of self purchased smoke and carbon monoxide detectors for their increased safety. Anyone wishing assistance can call the department to arrange an appointment.

Over the year we have worked with many businesses in the community performing inspections and assisting with answering questions. We look to develop corporative relationships with businesses to assist them with their safety programs, such as fire extinguisher training, participating in safety drills, and assisting with emergency preparedness. Businesses interested in available programs are asked to contact the fire prevention office for available programs.

Specialized Community Services:

CPR/First Aid - We provide the public with Community CPR & First Aid. The ongoing need from town business, community groups, organizations, and the general public for CPR and First Aid classes has been a large part of our life saving education. During the year we trained about 70 people in these important life safety courses. These classes are delivered at little to no cost other than the cost of cards to businesses, organizations, community groups, and general public from Westminster.

Lock Boxes - The Department works with residents interested in the use of residential lock boxes. The department keeps a few lock boxes purchased with donated funds to assist residents who often contact us about handicapped, or otherwise physically impaired family members that may need emergency services during hours when other caregivers are not home. Since the Fire Department does not hold residential keys it is possible that the only way we can get in the residence when needed is to force entry. We loan lock boxes to residents with temporary problems or until they can purchase there own. Anyone interested in the Lock Box program or is looking to purchase their own lock box is encouraged to contact the department.

Halloween Bon Fire - Each year the Department partners with the Friends of the Library to provide the Halloween Bon Fire held at the Public Safety Facility. This event attracts hundreds of adults and children and provides an opportunity to meet residents and to answer questions about the department.

Event Planning - The Department consults on event management venues in town. The Fire Department has developed unique skills to coordinate large multi-jurisdictional resources through managing large incidents and attending training. Any business or civic group interested in assistance in event planning should contact the department. Our assistance helps with planning a safe event for the public. During the Town's 250th Anniversary we worked with the State Department of Fire Services to set up their mobile command center to coordinate the parade activities. On a smaller scale we worked with the 250th Talent Show organizers to assist with radio communication the night of the event.

Mid-State Fire Mutual Aid – Westminster is a member of the Mid-State Fire Mutual Aid Association and like other Fire Departments in the area we continue to be dependent on mutual aid due to shortages in manpower, and ensuring firefighter safety. (It takes a minimum of 16 firefighters to fight a house fire.)

Department Equipment:

Fire Equipment - All hose has been tested and defective hose taken out of service or repaired. Fire pumps as well as Fire Ladders have been tested and certified to meet original specifications and repaired as needed. SCBA (Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus), along with the compressed air we put in the bottles, is also tested each year.

Rescue Truck (R1) (2000) American LaFrance. This vehicle provides EMS (Emergency Medical Services) and Fire Rescue services to the town and is in good condition and it will need some body work in the future to keep it in its current condition. It is licensed as a Class V Ambulance (back-up ambulance)

Ambulance 1 (A1) (2007 Ford Ambulance) Horton. It is used to respond to Emergency Medical calls and transport patients to the hospital. The vehicle is in excellent condition.

Engine 1 (E1) (1999 Class A pumper) KME. It carries 1000 gallons of water and Class B foam to fight flammable liquid fires, and is in very good condition. Although there is some corrosion we are looking to pay for this work out of the department's budget.

Engine 2 (E2) (2001 Class A pumper) KME. It carries 2500 gallons of water and has a Class "A" foam system that doubles the rate of fire suppression. This vehicle is also capable of operating as a tanker by performing water shuttles, and is in very good condition.

Engine 4 (E4) (1990 Class A Pumper) KME. It carries 1000 gallons of water, and is in good condition for a mid-life vehicle. We obtained \$45,000 at the May 2009 Annual Town Meeting to perform some refurbish some of the vehicle. The original request of \$90,000 to refurbish the entire vehicle was reduced to assist with finances due to the recession. Although we will be fixing some safety problems and abating corrosion the vehicle with the funds appropriated it still needs more work in the future. Since the vehicle lacks many safety standards required for new vehicles repair or refurbishment would not address these issues and only a replacement will solve this out of date vehicle problems from a safety perspective.

Tower 1 (T1) (2005 Ladder Truck) KME 95 ft aerial ladder with tower bucket and 300 gallons of water and 2000 GPM pump. The vehicle is in very good.

Engine 5 (E5) (2008 Mini-Pumper) CET. Engine 5 is a multi-purpose vehicle that is used year-round to respond to all outdoor fires and its size and weight allow it to be the initial structural fire response for those areas in town like Leino Park where bridge weight restrictions require the larger apparatus to take back roads that are not suited for ease of response. The vehicle carries 300 gallons of water and compressed air foam and is 4-wheel drive.

Utility Vehicles: The department has 3 utility vehicles as follows: Car 1 (2008, Chief's car – Excellent condition) and is designed to be an emergency response vehicle and the primary command vehicle at major incidents. The vehicle was replaced in 2008. Car 2 (2003, Duty Officer's car good condition) and is designed to be an emergency response vehicle and the secondary command vehicle when the Car 1 is not available. This vehicle will need to be planned for future replacement. Car 3 (2007 utility pick up truck – excellent condition)

Radio Equipment: The UHF radio system is in good condition. All firefighters have UHF portable radios and pagers for their safety. The department maintains our Low-band radio system as a back up and communications system for alerting and all communications on UHF are repeated on Low-Band. The public wishing to listen to us can tune their scanner to either 460.1625 or 33.96 with a PL of 127.3

Breathing Apparatus: The breathing apparatus are fully compliant and inspected and tested yearly. In the future we will need to plan on replacing the carbon wrapped bottles that carry the air as they have a limited life expectancy.

Station:

Our station is well maintained and in good structural condition, but lacks functional living, storage, and operational space. When the public safety complex was expanded in 1995 and the Fire Department moved in we quickly ran out of storage space for the small equipment and supplies we need to carry. Two storage sheds were added in the rear of the station over the years to assist with cold storage. Although this has been done we significantly lack space for records management and equipment and supplies. Although the Town has moved forward with a Public Safety Space Needs Committee to address the space needs of both the Fire and Police, this is seen as a long term solution.

Due to problems with the prevailing wage laws in the State we have been unable to fund improvements where the firefighters do the work. Costs to make improvements although funded were unspent and returned as the prevailing wage law requirements caused the cost of the project to double in cost.

The Town should continue to consider the possible solution that we have proposed is to build a Sub Fire Station on the land donated for such purpose on a parcel of land at the intersection of South Ashburnham Road and Whitmanville Road. This location provides a strategic location for a future Fire Sub-Station in the northern third of town, where growth is being experienced. The capital plan for the Fire Department includes the eventual need for a sub-station to adequately service the residents in this area and the Space Needs Committee is also considering this alternative. The fire department sees this being considered a long term solution that will be addressed by the Public Safety Building Committee.

Contact Information:

Location: Fire Station is located at 7 South Street, Westminster, MA 01473

Phone: 978-874-2313, Dispatcher Ext 0, Chief Ext 230, Fire Prevention Ext 232, Administrator Ext

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Office hours: Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Appointments: During normal office hours or by special appointment

E-mail: <u>firechief@westminster-ma.gov</u>
Web page: www.westminster-ma.org/fire.htm

General:

The Fire Department submits a capital replacement schedule as part of the yearly budget review. This capital plan needs to be put into an overall capital replacement plan for the Town to ensure that future funding for replacement is available in advance of the need.

Firefighting work is labor extensive and the Captain along with the 6 full-time firefighters we currently have working shifts alone can not meet the demands of the job by themselves. It actually takes a minimum of 16 firefighters to initially fight a house fire. The few full-time firefighters can not safety do their jobs without call firefighters. As the call firefighters ranks have declined the town has been put in the position to increase the number of full-time firefighters to offset the trend and ensure that the work can get done.

The Fire Department is put in a difficult situation because of the lack of call firefighters. Residents do not want their taxes to go up but on the other hand we do not see the public willing to become call firefighters to help solve the problem.

The problem we have is that the trend of attracting new call firefighters has not changed much over the years. With all the press and discussion about increased taxes we have not seen any new call firefighters complete the training and help turn the tide of the problem.

Therefore I must write what I have written in the past.

"With out community support for the fire department in terms of people wishing to be call firefighters and coming day or night when you are called we will need more full time firefighters. It is not something the Chief and all firefighters control as we cannot do the job in the future with out help either call or full time."

It takes a special group of men and woman that demonstrate an unselfish willingness to serve the Town to deliver the Fire Department's services. The few highly dedicated skilled call and full time

firefighters that comprise the Department are responsible for the day-to-day operations. They have done a wonderful job of working with the community to delivery excellent services that have improved each year. They have my respect for the commitment and dedication they demonstrate. We welcome you to visit <u>your</u> Fire Station and meet the men and woman who stand ready when emergencies occur.

From time to time the Department receives cash donations from the public. These funds are utilized to purchase, or combine with town funds to purchase equipment that assist us deliver the services to the people we serve. The Department wishes to thank all that donate to the department either in cash and or services to help offset the cost to the town and improve the safety of the firefighters. The support from the community makes the job just that much easier for all of us, and the presents, cakes, cookies, and candies say thank you in a big way.

I would like to thank other town departments for their high level of cooperation and professionalism in assisting us in delivering emergency services. Special thanks to the Police Department and the Public Works Department for their assistance at the many emergency responses we make each year.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chief Brenton W. MacAloney