

**ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT REGIONAL
DISTRICT**

**REPORT ON THE SPROAT LAKE VOLUNTEER
FIRE DEPARTMENT**

SEPTEMBER 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following notes summarize the key findings and recommendations from a review of the Sproat Lake Volunteer Fire Department (SLVFD) in May and June 2011.

Findings

- SLVFD is critically understaffed by 18 volunteer firefighters, based on a standard of a minimum of 15 firefighters per hall and 45 firefighters for the Department.
- Fire Underwriters reported less understaffing in 2006 (i.e. 11 firefighters below standard) with an urgent recommendation that this issue be addressed. Understaffing has been a challenge for the Department for some time.
- Recruiting new volunteer firefighters is challenging because of the characteristics of the Sproat Lake community, i.e.:
 - High home prices
 - Older residents
 - No local jobs
 - High absentee ownership
- There is no clear accountability for recruitment of volunteers, and programs and strategies to recruit volunteer firefighters are not specific or sustained.
- The three SLVFD fire halls are well located but barely meet operational, training and safety requirements. The buildings are more like garages for trucks than fire halls.
- Having three fire halls suits the geography and development of the area but results in significant overlapping coverage and the challenges of staffing and managing three separate locations. Technically, only two halls are required to cover the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area.
- The Department has a Fire Underwriters Dwelling Protection Grade of 3B(S), which is equivalent to having hydrant service. This rating is based on Department firefighters having achieved a Superior Tanker Shuttle Service accreditation in 2006.
- The Department is due for an accreditation review this year. (i.e. There is a five year accreditation cycle.) Maintaining the Superior Tanker Shuttle Service accreditation may be challenging because of higher performance

standards and the Department's below standard staffing.

- With the Department's three fire halls and current level of active volunteer firefighters, the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area could be graded as unprotected by Fire Underwriters.
- Moving from a protected to unprotected grade would likely increase residential insurance premiums in the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area by \$1.4 million annually.
- Maintaining three fire halls and a staffing compliment of 45 firefighters with low annual incident demands may be beyond the capacity of the community.
- It would be possible to move to two fire halls or even one fire hall and still cover most properties in the fire protection area. However, response times could increase for some properties.
- If the Department reduced the number of halls, there would be immediate relief from recruiting and staffing requirements.
- Most homes around the east end of Sproat Lake are at risk from wildfires. There is also significant risk of structure fires spreading to nearby homes because of the proximity of buildings along the lake.
- The Department is not organized or resourced to support extensive fire prevention and public education programs.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are presented below:

- SLVFD should appoint a Staffing Officer who is accountable for directing and managing volunteer recruitment processes for SLVFD.
- SLVFD should budget \$15,000 annually to support volunteer recruitment plans and activities.
- As a recruitment and retention strategy, ACRD should reduce property taxes or provide grants to resident firefighters of \$500 per year.
- The Department should also budget \$15,000 annually for fire prevention and public education programs and initiatives. Fire prevention and education are critical needs in the area because of the wildfire risk and proximity of structures along the lake.

- Ideally, SLVFRD should begin to describe itself as a two hall department immediately (i.e. Halls 1 and 3) with Hall 2 used as a garage or ancillary/seasonal hall. This should reduce SLVFDs staffing requirements to 30 volunteer firefighters in line with Fire Underwriter requirements.
- SLVFD should replace Halls 2 and 3 with a large new fire hall located on Highway 4 between Faber Road and Airport Road.
- The replacement hall should have facilities that enable it to function as the main hall for the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area (e.g. 4 bays, room for 8 trucks, training facilities).
- For the present, the roof on Hall 3 should be repaired. However, seismic upgrading should be deferred until it is clear what the Regional District, residents of the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area and SLVFD decide to do about the Department's hall structure.

Costs

The projected costs of our recommendations are outlined below:

- | | |
|---|--|
| • New hall | \$3.5 million (capital cost/paid over 20 yrs.) |
| • Recruiting initiatives | \$15,000/yr. |
| • Property tax reduction/grant for firefighters of \$500 each | \$15,000/yr. |
| • Fire prevention and public education | \$15,000/yr. |

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REVIEW OBJECTIVES

There are three primary objectives in carrying out this review, namely:

- Improve the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters
- Decide whether to fix the roof and carry out the seismic upgrading at Hall 3 or to engage in a more fundamental restructuring of fire halls and their locations
- Review fire service operations and provide recommendations for improvement.

Each of these objectives is a complex issue in its own right. However, taken together, they raise a fourth challenge namely, what do residents and the Regional District want from the fire service in Sproat Lake?

By looking at the future of SLVFD, Sproat Lake residents and the Regional District will be able to make sound decisions about basic issues such as firefighter recruitment and fire hall needs.

To cover all the options and issues of fire service futures is beyond the scope of this review. Accordingly, we will report on what we see as a reasonable future for the fire service and will make recommendations based on this scenario.

CONTEXT

Before getting into detailed analysis and recommendations, it is helpful to understand the current situation with the Sproat Lake Fire Department and the community. This background provides a context for the subsequent analysis of issues and recommendations for improvement.

- Sproat Lake is a residential/recreation community with little business or commercial activity.
- The community is concentrated around the east end of Sproat Lake where there are approximately 1,150 residential and seasonal homes.
- Overall, there are 1,300 residential lots in the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area (Exhibit 1) with an off-season population of approximately 1,200 to 1,500 and a summer population of over 3,000.

- Many owners are non-resident and their homes are unoccupied for much of the time. The percentage of unoccupied homes is estimated at 30% to 50%.
- With absentee owners, there are greater risks that structure fires will go undetected until they reach an advanced stage.
- A high proportion of residential lots have three or more substantial buildings (e.g. main residence, large garage/workshop, guest cabin). Accordingly, there are many structures in a relatively close proximity along the lake.
- The narrow lots, close proximity of buildings and mature trees, vegetation and forestland fuel combine to make some areas very high risk if a major structure fire occurs.
- Because most residents are located in woodlands, there are also extreme interface fire risks in the summer when conditions are hot and dry.
- Houses range from older cottages to large new modern residences. Some homes are gated. Fire crews carry bolt cutters in order to enter properties with locked gates.
- An estimated 30% of homes have alarm systems and false alarms are a growing problem for SLVFD.
- Many of the properties along the lake have steep access. As a result, fire trucks are left at the road and crews must fight fires some distance from their trucks.
- Fire crews depend on fire trucks and tankers for their initial water supply and then resort to water shuttle service and portable tanks. There are three hydrants in the area (i.e. one at Fire Hall #3 and two near McCoy Lake to fill trucks and tankers). Sometimes, crews use portable pumps at the edge of the lake to provide water for fire suppression.
- While many of the homes serviced by the Fire Department are on waterfront property, firefighters cannot always reach the lake. Some residents allow fire crews access to the waterfront to obtain water for firefighting purposes. Each fire truck carries a list of residents who have offered this service.
- In 2006, SLVFD earned Superior Tanker Shuttle Service (STSS) accreditation from the Fire Underwriters organization. This means that for fire insurance purposes, residential structures within eight kilometres by road of a Sproat Lake fire hall are rated as if they were protected by nearby water hydrants.

- There are a number of firefighting support services in the Sproat Lake community and nearby, i.e.:
 - MARS water bomber base on Sproat Lake
 - Beaver Creek Fire Department (9.1 kilometres to Hall 3)
 - Cherry Creek Fire Department (14 kilometres to Hall 3)
 - Port Alberni Fire Department (9.3 kilometres to Hall 3)
 - Ministry of Forests unit crew at the Port Alberni Airport from April to September
 - Ministry of Forests unit crew in Errington from April to September
- The local unit crew and the MARS water bombers give the SLVFD and residents an extra level of protection for wildfire suppression.
- SLVFD currently has mutual aid agreements with Port Alberni and the Beaver Creek and Cherry Creek Fire Departments through the Regional District (ACRD).
- ACRD and SLVFD are working on an automatic aid agreement with the Port Alberni Fire Department. The Port Alberni fire hall is located 9.3 kilometres and 9 minutes from Hall 3. This agreement and the support provided by the Port Alberni Fire Department will be of critical importance in the years ahead.
- Based on the OCP for the Sproat Lake area, there will be little new development. Essentially all available lots are developed. However, there are opportunities for densification and development of multi unit buildings on existing lots. There is also a planned residential development at Great Central Lake within the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area.
- SLVFD has three fire halls which are strategically located on each side of the lake (Halls 1 and 2) and along Highway 4 (Hall 3).
- The halls are essentially garages for the fire trucks and have little additional useable space and facilities needed by firefighters (e.g. showers, washing machines for cleaning gear, areas to store and dry turnout gear, backup generators, personal lockers, training rooms).
- Hall 3 needs to be seismically upgraded and the roof leaks. Rather than just proceed with this work, the Regional District CAO and Fire Chief decided that a more comprehensive review of fire hall issues needed to be carried out.
- In 2010, the Department responded to 23 fire and alarm calls, 30 medical calls and 17 calls for other emergency services such as attending motor vehicle accidents (Exhibit 3). Incident levels peak in June through August

(Exhibit 4).

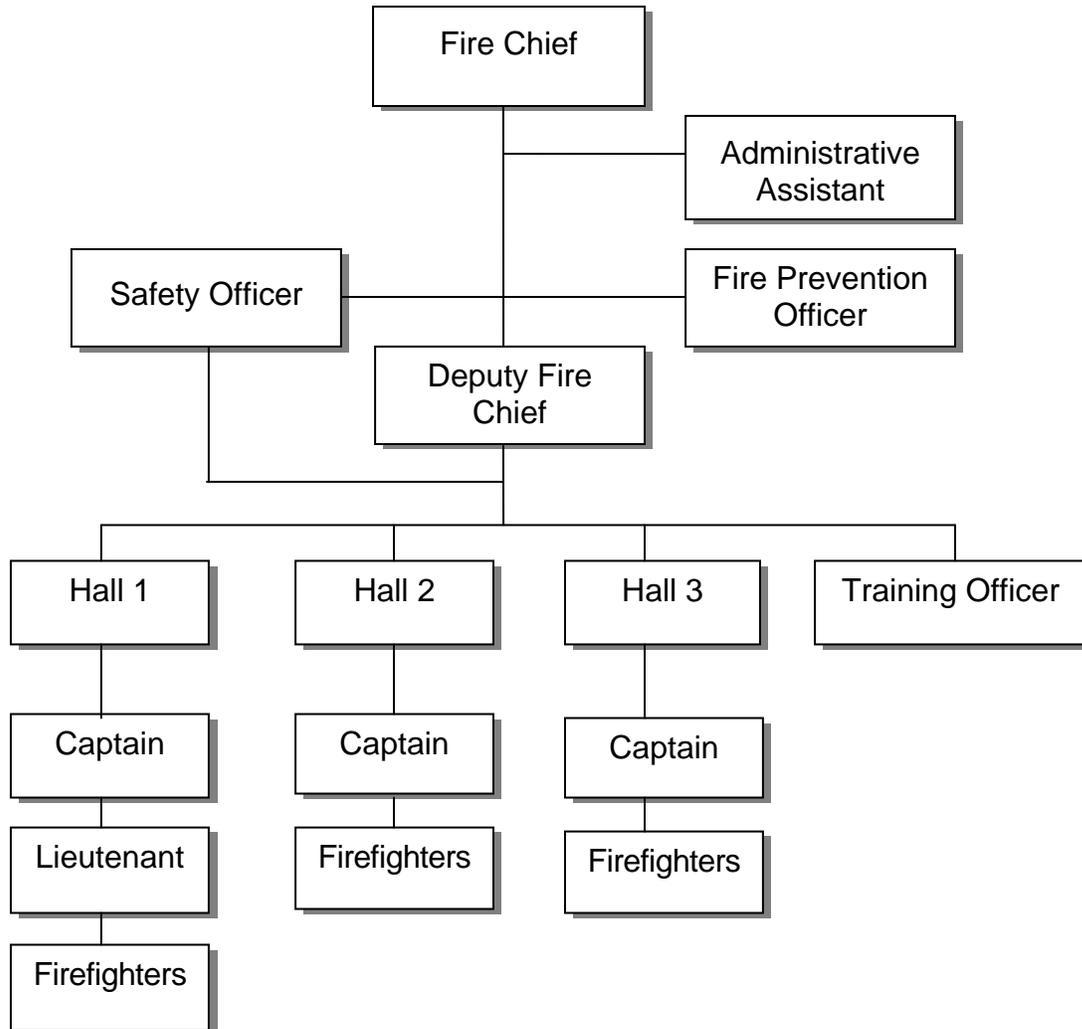
- SLVFD has 7 fire apparatus (i.e. 3 licensed and 1 unlicensed fire trucks and 3 tankers/water tenders) (Exhibit 5)
- The Department has 27 volunteer firefighters plus 4 new recruits and 6 junior firefighters (Exhibit 6). Fire Underwriters require a minimum of 15 firefighters per hall. Accordingly, SLVFD is currently short staffed by 18 firefighters. We have been unable to determine if SLVFD has ever had 45 firefighters.
- A number of factors have combined to make it extremely challenging to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters from the community:
 - Up to half of the owners do not live at Sproat Lake year round
 - House prices are extremely high and it is difficult for younger families to afford a house in the community
 - Many residents are older and semi-retired or retired
 - There are no local jobs so residents who are working commute to jobs outside the community and are frequently not available to respond to daytime fire service page outs
- The Department's annual budget in 2010 was just under \$180,000 (Exhibit 7). This excludes depreciation costs for the trucks and halls and the cost of dispatch services.
- Dispatch services are provided by North Island Dispatch which also serves all other fire departments in the Regional District.
- Currently, ACRD is recruiting a fire service coordinator who will be able to provide assistance to SLVFD relating to records, reporting, purchasing and administrative support.

FINDINGS

In the following section of this report, we have presented our findings relating to fire service staffing, hall issues and operations.

ORGANIZATION

SLVFD is organized as presented on the chart below:



SLVFD firefighters are trained to respond to structure and other types of fires and emergency medical services.

FIRE UNDERWRITER INSURANCE RATINGS

The Sproat Lake community is rated at the 3B(S) Dwelling Protection grade level by Fire Underwriters. This is equivalent to a fully protected fire service area with hydrant water service.

The community's Superior Tanker Shuttle Service accreditation is five years old and is due to be re-evaluated this year. It is uncertain whether the SLVFD will be re-accredited because of the current performance standards (Exhibit 2) and the current shortage of volunteers.

Specific accreditation challenges include:

- Pumping 265 imperial gallons of water for 90 minutes
- Having the pumping flow commence in two minutes of arrival at the test site
- Delivering water from a fully reliable water source
- Having 15 volunteers per fire hall

At present staffing levels, the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area could have its Dwelling Protection Grade reduced.

OPERATIONS

With the shortage of volunteers and the unavailability of firefighters during working hours, all volunteers are paged out for fire calls. Only firefighters with emergency medical certificates are paged for first responder incidents. In medical incidents, those arriving first assess the situation and frequently notify those on the way to stand down.

Turnouts of volunteers to incidents vary widely based on the day of the week and time. Weekend and evening/night page outs are usually well attended.

Firefighters who arrive at the hall first take the fire truck. Later arrivals then drive to the incident in their own vehicles and put on their firefighting gear at the scene.

RESPONSE TIMES

A key indicator of fire department effectiveness is incident response time. Exhibit 8 provides details of incident response times in 2010. These times are good for a suburban/rural fire department at 11 minutes, 43 seconds for fire calls from the time the call is made to SLVFD. The Department's emergency medical response times are slightly better at 9 minutes, 43 seconds. North Island Dispatch response time records are not completely accurate. Accordingly, these response times are the best available data at this time.

In looking at response times, we also examined seasonal patterns of incidents. These statistics are presented in Exhibit 4 and show that June through August are more active months with about 40% of the incidents. This is to be expected with the high levels of residence, visitation and community activity at this time of the year.

FIRE APPARATUS AND EQUIPMENT

SLVFD has 7 fire trucks. Details are listed in Exhibit 3.

The Department uses three portable tanks to back up the water supplies in the fire truck and tankers. Fire trucks also carry portable pumps, which can be used to put water from the lake on a fire.

Three of the fire trucks each hold three firefighters and the fourth truck holds six firefighters.

Turn out gear is usually stored on the fire truck or carried in the firefighter's own vehicle.

As part of its emergency planning for the area, the Regional District has placed an emergency kit in the old school gym near Hall 3.

None of the halls has an up to date computer.

HALL LOCATIONS

The three fire halls are well located for the community that they serve. In fact, there is significant overlapping coverage between the three halls.

Halls 1 and 2 are located near the lake and close to major clustering of waterfront residences. Hall 3 is on the highway and is positioned to serve rural properties and other important sites (e.g. Port Alberni airport, parks located on Highway 4). Hall 3 is also positioned to serve properties along the road to Great Central Lake.

Hall 2 is located on a road allowance and has lakefront access. There is provision for a rescue boat in the back of the hall as well as a dock on the lake. Hall 2 has a pump house at the water's edge with a hose connection in the fire hall in order to fill the fire truck and tanker.

A map of the area is presented in Exhibit 9 with 7 km. circles centred from each fire hall. Fire insurance ratings are based on an 8 km. distance by road from a fire hall. The 7 km. circles of coverage are therefore approximate.

The key lessons from the map are that there is extensive overlapping coverage between the three halls and that SLVD only needs two fire halls. Having three halls improves response times in some cases but technically, SLVFD should be a two hall department.

FIRE HALL VALUES

The assessed values and annual depreciation of the three fire halls are presented in Exhibits 10 and 11 respectively.

Hall 1 has the highest value by far because of the land assessment. Hall 2 is the lowest since it is built on road allowance land that has no assessed value.

HALL CONFIGURATION

Halls 1 and 2 each have three truck bays. Hall 3 has two truck bays. There is reasonable parking for volunteers at Halls 1 and 3. Parking at Hall 2 on Faber Road is tight.

Inside the halls, space around the trucks is limited. Hall 3 is the only one to have a washing machine and a shower unit.

Hall 3 has two small/cramped offices, a smaller training/common room and a large hall area.

Each hall has residential style kitchen facilities with a refrigerator and stove.

We are advised that there are no problems in opening the truck bay doors manually in the event of a power outage.

HALL ISSUES

There are a number of issues with the halls as described below and in Exhibit 12.

- There are no showers or machines for washing turnout gear in Halls 1 and 2.
- No halls have emergency generators.
- Halls 1 and 2 have been upgraded for seismic events. Hall 1 seismic work is not complete.
- Hall 3 has not been seismically upgraded and the roof leaks. There is some urgency in fixing the roof in order to avoid damage to the building structure.
- There is no known asbestos in any of the halls.

- The water supply at Hall 3 is not completely reliable.
- There is very limited storage space in each hall for firefighting supplies, equipment and turnout gear.
- There is no adequate space to hang and dry turnout gear or lockers for volunteers to store a change of clothes.
- Space around the trucks is particularly limited in Hall 3.
- In its Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), the Regional District has identified the Sterling Road area in the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area as one of the highest risk locations.
- Halls 1 and 2 are located in forested areas and could be unusable if the area has to be evacuated because of wildfire risks.
- There are three bridges between Port Alberni and Hall 3. We are advised that there is little risk of loss of any of these bridges in case of an earthquake.

TRAVEL DISTANCES

Exhibit 12 presents key distances between fire halls and the areas they serve.

From	To	Distance	Estimated Travel Time
Hall 1	Hall 2	11 km.	9 minutes
Hall 1	Hall 3	8.4 km.	6 minutes
Hall 2	Hall 3	5.8 km.	6 minutes
Port Alberni Fire Hall	Hall 3	9.3 km.	9 minutes
Beaver Creek Fire Hall	Hall 3	9.1 km.	9 minutes

- Hall 3 has good access to the residential areas served by Halls 1 and 2 via the east end of Lakeshore Road and McCoy Lake Road respectively.

HALL OPTIONS

SLVFD has three main options (Exhibit 14) in examining its fire halls, namely:

1. Live with the hall structure as it is but carry out roof repairs and necessary seismic work and upgrading in Hall 3.
2. Close one or more halls and consolidate operations.
3. Replace one or two halls with a major new hall.

The first option is clear and has a rough one-time cost of approximately \$330,000. The estimate is based on the following preliminary costs:

- \$40,000 to repair the roof in Hall 3
- \$260,000 for seismic upgrading and renovation of Hall 3
- \$30,000 for completion of the seismic upgrading at Hall 1

ACRD has just received a grant of \$204,700 to assist with renovating and upgrading Hall 3.

The second option has three subsets, namely:

- Close Hall 1
- Close Hall 2
- Close Hall 3

It is possible to close two of the three halls, but this is not a logical alternative unless Option 3 is considered.

With Option 3, ACRD would replace one or two halls (i.e. Halls 2 and 3) and build a new fully functional main hall and possibly leave one or two satellite halls.

CRITERIA FOR REVIEWING THE HALL STRUCTURE

In this section of the report, we will outline the factors that ACRD and stakeholders should consider to make an effective hall structure decision.

Service Needs

The three current halls are relatively well located for the geography, road system, building stock and lake and terrain complexities of the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area.

The halls are likely located based on the Fire Underwriters standard of being no more than 8 kilometres by road from the structures that are to be protected. In fact,

there is a good degree of overlap in coverages when an 8 kilometre road measure is used (Exhibit 9).

For volunteer fire departments, multiple halls can make operations more complicated. For example, with SLVFD, all fire incidents are full page outs. Accordingly, all available volunteers drive to their home hall where their gear is usually stored in the truck. This means that three sets of fire trucks (i.e. pumper and tanker) potentially attend an incident anywhere in the fire service area.

If firefighters arrive after the engine and tanker have left, they drive to the incident in their own vehicle and change into fire fighting gear at the scene.

Sometimes, say, during normal working hours on weekdays, only one truck may respond. The three hall structure divides the firefighter group and possibly over-extends demands on the volunteer firefighter group as a whole (i.e. everyone responds to every incident). In turn, this makes it harder to recruit and retain volunteers.

Also, the three halls can drift into a structure where there are essentially three almost independent fire departments with varying practices, operating methods and cultures. There is some evidence of this “separation” in our survey of SLVFD members (Appendix A).

So, three halls help meet Fire Underwriter requirements and improve response times in some cases, but can make volunteer operations more complex and demanding.

Three halls also are hard to staff. For example, SLVFD does not currently have adequate staff for even two halls using Fire Underwriters criteria of 15 firefighters per hall.

With short staffing and the new performance criteria for Superior Tanker Shuttle Service accreditation, it is possible that the Department will lose its favourable Fire Underwriters insurance rating.

Other challenges of having three halls are:

- Increased heat, light, maintenance costs for three halls
- Tolerance of below standard facilities because of the costs of upgrading three halls (e.g. space for turnout gear, showers for decontamination, washing machines to clean turnout gear, standby generators, lockers for volunteers)

Through no one’s fault, SLVFD finds itself with three local but somewhat marginal halls. By skimping over the years on infrastructure to, say, offset the cost of having a good vehicle fleet, the Department is now facing a much bigger decision, namely

“soldier on” or really transform the hall structure and operations to have a better future.

This brings us to additional hall decision criteria that should be considered, namely:

- Reducing hall energy consumption and related costs
- Having appropriate facilities for volunteers who are frequently engaged in dirty and risky activities
- Having a facility that can be considered as a refuge for community members with upgraded cooking/kitchen facilities and standby power generation
- Having fuel storage capacity in case of emergency conditions. For example, is the Department at risk if hydro power or the main bridge to Port Alberni is lost?
- Being located near a high volume water source
- Being located away from the wildfire risks that could potentially affect access to a hall (e.g. Halls 1 and 2)
- Meeting WorkSafe BC requirements, say, for separating clean and contaminated turnout gear
- Sustaining and hopefully improving response times and volunteer turnout
- Providing volunteers with enough “incident” experience to justify the personal sacrifices of being a firefighter

IMPACTS OF CLOSING ONE FIRE HALL

The impacts of closing one of the three SLVFD fire halls are presented below. Several parts of the Sproat Lake Fire Service Area are beyond 8 kilometres from a fire hall, namely:

- Residential/recreational property beyond the 19,000 address on Highway 4 at the west end of Sproat Lake (i.e. 34 homes)
- Lots, homes, buildings right at Great Central Lake (i.e. say, 5 lots with buildings)

These lots are technically unprotected because they are beyond 8 kilometres from a fire hall by road and likely do not benefit from the favourable Fire Underwriters residential insurance rating. They are excluded from our analysis.

a) Impacts of Closing Hall 1

The impacts of closing Hall 1 are summarized below:

- 58 residences in the 13,000 to 18,000 blocks along Highway 4 would become unprotected because of their distance from Hall 3
- 270 homes in the Lakeshore Road area west of Hall 1 would also become unprotected
- Incident response times to properties in the Lakeshore Road area east of Hall 1 would be longer by six or more minutes because of the travel distance from Hall 3, road conditions and the extra time needed by some volunteers to get to Hall 3 and return with a fire truck

b) Impacts of Closing Hall 2

There would be no change in the fire protection status of homes in the fire service area covered by Hall 2. However, incident response times could increase somewhat depending on location because of firefighter travel time required to reach Hall 3 and drive from Hall 3 to the incident.

c) Impacts of Closing Hall 3

If Hall 3 were to be closed, the following impacts would occur:

- 40 large and small properties northeast of Hall 3 by the Somass River would move to unprotected fire status
- The Port Alberni airport would no longer fall within the 8 kilometre range of a fire hall and would lose its favourable fire protection insurance status
- Servicing to homes and country properties to the northeast of Hall 3 would be slower because of the distance from Hall 2

d) Summary

SLVFD has done a good job in locating its three fire halls to balance and optimize coverages, road access and travel times. As already noted, there is a good degree of overlapping coverages.

If a hall was to be closed, it appears that Hall 2 would be the most likely choice. With this action, response times along Faber Road would increase in some cases.

A summary of key hall structure options and their impacts is presented in Exhibit 15.

The property tax implications of key fire hall options are outlined in Exhibit 16.

INCIDENT VOLUMES

As shown in Exhibit 3, incident volumes have been relatively stable over the past few years.

The greatest changes in recent years are responding to false alarms and to motor vehicle accidents (MVAs).

Annual fire related incidents are in the 10 to 20 range. False alarms are steady at 8 per year but peaked at 13 in 2010. Emergency medical services are in the order of 30 per year.

On an overall basis, SLVFD is responding to about 1.4 calls per week with higher levels in the June to August period of about 2 incidents per week (Exhibit 4).

STAFFING

As summarized in Exhibit 6 and based on Fire Underwriter standards, SLVFD is short 18 staff. None of the three halls meets the target of 15 volunteer firefighters. We have excluded inactive, non-responding, new and junior volunteers and the Fire Chief from this count.

Being short staffed is a critical situation for the Department and is a key reason for this review.

Current recruiting activities range from going door to door periodically to recruit volunteers to using local newspaper advertising and newsletter announcements of the need for additional volunteers.

STAFF RELATIONS

Many of those responding to the volunteers' survey questionnaire gave high ratings for Department leadership, work culture and teamwork (Appendix A). On the other hand, one in four noted concerns with internal politics, cliques and leadership.

There were enough low ratings to signal that volunteer relations is a significant Department challenge (Exhibit 17).

This issue likely hurts the Department in several ways. First, problematic relationships and leadership may encourage volunteers to leave. Second, interpersonal friction may make it difficult to attract volunteers from the community. Third, being short staffed so significantly means that officers may avoid dealing with discipline issues and dysfunctional behaviour (e.g. interpersonal conflicts, missing training sessions) in order to retain staff.

SLVFD STAFFING VERSUS INCIDENT VOLUMES

From a coverage and response time perspective, it makes sense to have three fire halls. Three halls means that there is a need for 45 volunteer firefighters plus the Fire Chief to meet the Fire Underwriter standard.

However, in a residential community like Sproat Lake, incident frequencies and often severities are low. In turn, this means that, at full strength (i.e. 45 volunteers), firefighters likely get less hands on incident experience. Without incident experience, it is hard to maintain firefighter interest and enthusiasm for weekly training and other demands.

Structuring SLVFD with three halls and 45 firefighters may be beyond the capacity of the community. The challenges of finding and keeping 45 volunteer firefighters in an older community, which is only partly occupied year round, suggest that some scaling back should be considered.

Accordingly, it may be advantageous for SLVFD to move to two halls and target staffing of 30 volunteers. This lower level of Department staffing:

- is easier to achieve and maintain
- gives firefighters reasonable levels of experience
- ensures that each volunteer feels he/she is an important and valuable member of the Department
- is easier to manage, train and motivate
- enables Chief Officers to deal with dysfunction behaviour
- makes it possible to attain Fire Underwriter staffing standards

VOLUNTEER RECRUITING AND RETENTION

Our findings relating to recruitment and retention of volunteers are presented below.

- There is no clear accountability for recruiting volunteers other than the Fire Chief. This responsibility appears to be a general expectation of all volunteers in the Department.
- The size of the market from which to recruit volunteers is very limited.
- A high proportion of residents either commute to work out of the area or are well on in years and are not looking for a new career with extensive training and physical demands.
- SLVFD currently has 27 volunteer firefighters (excluding rookies, junior volunteers, those on leave or away and the Fire Chief). This level of staffing is well below industry norms and the Fire Underwriter standard of 15 volunteers per fire hall.
- If the Department casts a wider recruiting net in surrounding areas, potential volunteers have other options, say, in volunteering for Beaver Creek Fire Department or other community service agencies.
- The commitment as a volunteer firefighter is no ordinary role because of the weekly training needs, the unpredictable call out demands, the personal risks of service and the challenges of dealing with community members in traumatic situations (e.g. first responder and motor vehicle crashes).
- The scale of SLVFD's current structure is a challenge since it is difficult to build and maintain a group of 45 volunteers.
- There does not seem to be a periodic mechanism to move volunteers between halls to balance staff levels, broaden exposure to local conditions and fire apparatus and to build stronger relationships across the Department rather than just at the hall level.
- The three halls are reported to train together about 20 to 25 times a year (i.e. 40% to 50% of the time). Most fire departments in our survey (Appendix B) report all training is done together despite having two or three halls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations for the Alberni Clayoquot Regional District and the Sproat Lake Volunteer Fire Department are presented below. We understand that some of our recommendations will be challenging to implement, may be overly prescriptive and may need further research.

Hall Structure

- SLVFD should build a large new centrally located hall to replace Halls 2 and 3. The new hall could serve as the main hall for the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area.
- The new hall should be located on Highway 4 west of Hall 3 between Faber Road and Airport Road.
- SLVFD should operate with two halls. While both Hall 1 and 2 are well located, the fire service logistics favour keeping Hall 1 over Hall 2.
- Hall 2 could continue as a seasonal auxiliary hall, training centre and garage with a pump capable of watering fire trucks and tankers quickly from the lake.
- By keeping Hall 2 as a garage, firefighters can still train there, trucks can be housed there and the Department still has direct access to the Lake.
- The new hall should be designed with four double truck bays with overall capacity for 8 fire trucks and tankers.
- There should be facilities that support a department of the size of SLVFD, namely:
 - Showers
 - Washing machines
 - Personal lockers
 - Area to hang and dry turnout gear
 - Several training/meeting rooms
 - Small commercial kitchen
 - Backup generator
 - Three to four offices
 - Large training/meeting/dining area
 - Fuel storage tank to provide emergency fuel for trucks and back up power generation

- A facility of this size could cost in the order of \$3.5 million plus the cost of land (based on the Nanoose research).
- By moving to two halls, SLVFD will only need 30 volunteer firefighters to meet Fire Underwriters standard of 15 members per hall.
- An important issue in hall location and design is to minimize the potential impacts and access to truck and equipment caused by wildfires. This is another important reason to build a new master hall and reduce dependence on Halls 1 and 2 where access could be lost in a catastrophic local wildfire.
- For the present, ACRD should fix the roof at Hall 3.
- A summary of reasons to build a new replacement hall are presented in Exhibit 18.

Operations

- In future, when ordering fire trucks, the Department should consider adding a four-wheel drive vehicle and have trucks with room for four to six firefighters. At present, SLVFD has no four-wheel drive vehicles and only one fire truck with space for six firefighters.
- Addition of a four-wheel drive rapid response vehicle for highway rescue/motor vehicle incidents should be considered over the longer term.
- Portable pumps for accessing lake/pond/stream water should, if practical, have over the shoulder slings that would make them easier to deploy over rough ground and down steep slopes.
- ACRD and SLVFD should budget \$15,000 to deliver wildfire prevention and protection programs and workshops for Sproat Lake area residents each year.
- These programs could extend to recommending specific portable pumps and sprinklers for residents to buy as well as conducting house-by-house wildfire risk assessments, possibly on a modest fee for service basis.
- The population of the Sproat Lake community doubles in the summer months with visitors, guests and returning owners. Many of these people may have little insight into local fire and fuel issues and wild land fire risks. Accordingly, the Department should provide workshops on a regular basis at halls, in parks and at community events to educate the public about fire prevention and fire risks. The Department should also provide information and articles to local

media to promote fire prevention behaviour.

- Fire prevention initiatives should be linked to volunteer recruitment programs to build local awareness and appreciation of the Department, its services and its volunteers.
- For any new multi-unit developments in the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area, the Regional District should require the use of “Fire Smart” building materials and construction (e.g. metal roof, fire resistant siding, standpipe water access, access for fire trucks).
- To increase the likelihood of securing Superior Tanker Shuttle Service accreditation, the Department should continue to plan and practice how to meet the new performance requirements (e.g. continuous flow of 265 imperial gallons per minute over an extended time).
- The Regional District/SLVFD should proceed with the proposed automatic aid agreement with Port Alberni. Part of the agreement should be a requirement that the two departments either train together or attend an incident together at least once per quarter on average (i.e. at least four times a year).
- Port Alberni firefighters should train in the community periodically in order to become familiar with road and radio communication conditions in the area.
- The Department should publicize its turnout times in order to demonstrate its value, importance and performance to the community as well as to communicate expected wait times once a 911 call is placed.
- With the low cost of computers, each hall should have a current computer with a printer and Internet access.
- The Department should conduct a self-assessment at least bi-annually using the Office of the Fire Commissioner’s Fire Department audit checklist.
- In the event of an earthquake, the Department could lose the water supply from the hydrants near Hall 3 and near McCoy Lake. Accordingly, there should be a contingency plan for dealing with this possibility.
- The Department should continue to work with other fire services in the Regional District and with the new ACRD Fire Service Coordinator to benefit from joint purchasing and to improve compatibility of firefighting equipment, e.g.:
 - Air packs/SCBA gear

- Hose couplings
 - Pumps and pump couplings
 - Hose sizes
 - Radios
- SLVFD should maximize its use of the new Fire Service Coordinator to improve its records management, reporting and administrative services.

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING

- SLVFD should appoint a Staffing Officer for the Department at the Deputy Chief level.
- This position should be responsible for:
 - Recruiting of volunteers
 - Placement of volunteers in halls
- While it makes sense for firefighters to work out of the closest hall to home, the Department should reserve the right to rebalance skills and staffing by hall periodically in order to foster a one Department focus rather than a federation of halls. Movement of firefighters between halls should not occur often and only after consultation with those affected.
- SLVFD should have a continuous and proactive recruitment program year round in anticipation of natural losses of volunteers because of work transfers, family issues, health needs and other normally recurring factors.
- A SLVFD volunteer recruitment manual is provided as Appendix C.
- SLVFD should aim to rebuild its staff to 45 to 50 volunteers within the next two years. This initiative should include recruitment of more women, nearby First Nations members and residents in the 50 to 65 age range.
- Alternatively, if SLVFD moves to two halls, the pressure on recruitment will be reduced.
- The Department should act quickly to solve interpersonal/ relationship challenges so that cliques, politics and uncivil behaviour are minimized. This change will be facilitated by developing and adopting a code of conduct/statement of values that stresses the need for teamwork and collaboration.

- In the process of strengthening the management of volunteers and restructuring the halls, the Department may lose some firefighters.
- The loss of firefighters because of the new hall structure will be reduced if the reasons for change are clearly communicated and firefighters are extensively involved in the design and equipping of the replacement hall.
- It is essential that the Department focus on being one organization. This means more inter-hall training and a single boot camp for new recruits.
- Whenever feasible, the Department should operate weekend boot camps to accelerate the orientation and training of new volunteers.
- Specialist officers (e.g. safety, training, prevention) may need to move to even higher levels of professionalism in terms of their respective portfolios. Examples of this higher level of performance could include:
 - Documentation of programs
 - Explanation of policies and procedures
 - Acquisition or development of web-based training materials
 - More formal evaluation of training events

Hopefully, the new Fire Service Coordinator will be able to assist specialist officers in their work.

- Each new volunteer should be mentored by an experienced firefighter for at least the first year of their service.
- To encourage the recruitment of volunteers and to recognize the contribution of volunteers to the community, the Regional District should reduce property taxes by \$500 or provide an equivalent grant to firefighters volunteering in their community. This policy would likely have to be extended to other Regional District fire services.
- Some fire departments are building their staff and spreading workloads by accepting that some volunteers want a more limited scope of service. Over time with this model, SLVFD could end up with volunteers and auxiliary Department members who only:
 - Do work as first responders, or
 - Maintain the halls, trucks, equipment and grounds, or
 - Do prevention and public education, or
 - Do fundraising
- SLVFD officers will need to consider the feasibility of this option.

COSTING

The costs of our recommendations are summarized below.

Recommendation	Annual Operating Cost	Capital Cost
Recruiting budget	\$15,000	
Prevention and public education budget	\$15,000	
Computers for halls	\$6,000	
Tax reduction grants for volunteer firefighters living in the Sproat Lake Fire Protection area (30 @ \$500)	\$15,000	
Reduction in Hall 1 and 2 operating costs	\$(5,000)	
New hall		\$3,500,000
Sale of Hall 3		\$(200,000)
Total	\$46,000	\$3,300,000

Property tax impacts of key options are presented in Exhibit 16 based on assessed values and a parcel tax approach.

As a condition of approving further development at Great Central Lake, ACRD should ask for a grant toward constructing the new replacement fire hall. The new hall should provide fully protected fire service coverage to the new development. Currently, this area is unprotected (i.e. beyond 8 kilometres from Hall 3).

An important issue from residents' perspective is the cost impacts of changes in the SLVFD and its structure.

While the risk may be small, it is possible that Fire Underwriters will assign a lower Dwelling Protection Grade to the community because of low firefighter staffing.

If the Superior Tanker Shuttle Service accreditation is not renewed and a major new hall is built, residents could experience a double "hit" in increased home insurance costs and property taxes respectively.

If the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area moved to unprotected grade, residential insurance premiums could increase by, say, \$1000 per household. Overall, the incremental cost would be in the order of \$1.4 million annually (i.e. 1400 properties x \$1000).

ISSUES NOT ADDRESSED

In reviewing the issues and options facing SLVFD, there are a number of areas that we have not researched. ACRD and SLVFD may wish to review one or more of the following areas in considering future directions for the Department:

- Appointing a part time or full time Fire Chief
- Moving to a paid on call compensation structure
- Hiring a full time training/prevention/safety officer
- Hiring two or three career firefighter positions
- Developing a single Alberni Valley fire service organization
- Taking on highway rescue/MVA coverage outside the Sproat Lake Fire Protection area
- Developing a seasonal volunteer firefighter role

CONCLUSION

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to everyone who has helped with this study. In particular, we appreciate the frank and direct comments of the SLVFD firefighters who participate in our survey. Your thoughts and ideas are most appreciated.

* * * * *

Dugal Smith & Associates
Burnaby, BC
August 2011

LIST OF EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1 - Proportion of Electoral Area E Covered by the Sproat Lake Volunteer Fire Department
- Exhibit 2 - Superior Tanker Shuttle Service Accreditation
- Exhibit 3 - SLVFD Incident History
- Exhibit 4 - Seasonality of Incidents
- Exhibit 5 - List of Major Fire Apparatus
- Exhibit 6 - Fire Hall Staffing
- Exhibit 7 - SLVFD Financial History
- Exhibit 8 - Incident Response Times in 2010
- Exhibit 9 - Fire Hall Coverage Map
- Exhibit 10 - Assessed Value of the Fire Halls
- Exhibit 11 - SLVFD Depreciation for 2010
- Exhibit 12 - Evaluation of Hall Functionality
- Exhibit 13 - Fire Hall Driving Distances and Travel Times
- Exhibit 14 - Summary of Hall Options
- Exhibit 15 - Hall Structure Options and Their Impacts
- Exhibit 16 - Estimated Tax Impacts of Selected Fire Hall Options
- Exhibit 17 - Firefighter Survey Responses Relating to Department Leadership and Culture
- Exhibit 18 - Reasons to Build a New Fire Hall
- Exhibit 19 - List of Participants / Interviewees
- Exhibit 20 - Reference Sources

**PROPORTION OF ELECTORAL AREA E COVERED BY THE SPROAT LAKE
 FIRE PROTECTION AREA**

The Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area covers approximately 88% of the developed land in Electoral Area E.

Assessment Classification	Number of Taxpayers in Electoral Area E	Number of Taxpayers in Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area	Percent of Electoral Area E covered by Fire Protection Area	Assessed Value in the Fire Protection Area (\$ million)
Residential	1,363	1,296	95%	\$573.083
Utilities	13	5	38%	\$.348
Major Industry	5	4	80%	\$9.013
Light Industry	45	19	42%	\$2.901
Business and Other	26	24	92%	\$7.586
Managed Forest Land	90	5	6%	\$4.501
Recreation/Non Profit	5	5	100%	\$.791
Farm	22	22	100%	\$.301
Total	1,569	1,380	88%	\$598.525

SUPERIOR TANKER SHUTTLE SERVICE ACCREDITATION

In 2006, SLVFD earned accreditation from Fire Underwriters for Superior Tanker Shuttle Service (STSS). This means that homes within 8 kilometres of a fire hall are rated for dwelling insurance purposes as if a water hydrant is available nearby. The STSS accreditation reduces home insurance premiums significantly.

SLVFD's STSS accreditation is due to be carried out again after five years but with more rigorous performance standards.

The accreditation standards are under review and subject to change. The current accreditation standards ¹ are as follows:

Accreditation Standards

Assessment Factor	Accreditation Standard
Water flow rate requirement	Minimum of 265 gallons per minute ²
Apparatus set up time allowed	2 minutes
Water supply points	Requirement to identify approved water supply points
Duration of accredited flow rate	90 minutes
Distance from fire hall	Residential up to 8 km. by road Commercial up to 5 km. by road
Water supply accessibility	Available 7 x 24
Reliability of water supply	Certificate required
Firefighter staffing	15 auxiliary firefighters per fire hall

¹ "Alternative Water Supplies for Public Fire Protection", Fire Underwriters Survey

² Imperial gallons

SLVFD INCIDENT HISTORY

This chart summarizes the incident history in the Sproat Lake Fire Service Area from 2006 to 2010 based on the best information available from North Island Dispatch ¹.

Incident Type	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2010 as % of 2006
Fire related	14	20	13	14	10	71%
False alarm	8	7	9	6	13	163%
First responder/EMS	30	31	22	41	30	100%
Motor vehicle accident	10	11	15	15	13	130%
Other	5	3	9	12	4	80%
Total incidents in the fire service area	67	72	68	88	70	104%

¹ North Island Dispatch records are incomplete. For example, they show 10% to 15% of incidents where SLVFD has not responded. This conflicts with SLVFD records.

SEASONALITY OF INCIDENTS ¹

This exhibit presents information on the seasonality of incidents in the Sproat Lake Fire Service Area. As expected, a high percentage of incidents (i.e. approximately 40%) occur in June through August.

Month	2007 Incidents		2008 Incidents		2009 Incidents		2010 Incidents	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
January	7	9.7%	12	17.6%	7	8.6%	5	7.1%
February	4	5.6%	4	5.9%	6	7.8%	4	5.7%
March	5	6.9%	3	4.4%	6	7.8%	9	12.9%
April	9	12.5%	3	4.4%	2	2.3%	2	2.9%
May	9	12.5%	2	2.9%	8	9.1%	4	5.7%
June	5	6.9%	6	8.8%	11	12.6%	4	5.7%
July	4	5.6%	8	11.8%	12	13.6%	13	18.6%
August	13	18.1%	14	20.6%	16	18.2%	11	15.7%
September	2	2.8%	6	8.1%	6	7.8%	6	8.6%
October	3	4.2%	4	5.9%	2	2.3%	6	8.6%
November	5	6.9%	3	4.4%	4	4.5%	3	4.3%
December	6	8.3%	3	4.4%	8	9.1%	3	4.3%
Total	72	100.0%	68	100%	88	100%	70	100%

¹ Includes incidents where there was no recorded SLVFD response.

LIST OF MAJOR FIRE APPARATUS

This exhibit lists the major firefighting vehicles employed by the SLVFD.

Vehicle	Year of Manufacture	Water Capacity	Notes
#47 Engine	2000	1000 IG	Hall 1 – pump capacity 650 gpm
#48 Tender	2003	1500 IG	Hall 1 – carries a portable pump
#42 Engine	1982	Foam	Hall 2 – truck is not certified
#45 Tender	2010	1500 IG	Hall 2 – carries a portable pump
#49 Engine	1988	1050 IG	Hall 2 – carries a portable pump
#41 Engine	2008	1000 IG	Hall 3 – pump capacity 1050 gpm
#43 Tender	2005	1500 IG	Hall 3 – carries a portable pump

FIRE HALL STAFFING

This exhibit summarizes SLVFD staffing by hall as of May 15, 2011. It also compares SLVFD staffing to Fire Underwriter standards for determining the Dwelling Protection Grade.

Fully Trained Staff	Hall #1	Hall #2	Hall #3	Total
Firefighters (excluding the Chief)	6	11	10	27
Fire Underwriter requirements for 3B(S) Dwelling Protection Grade	15	15	15	45
Firefighters needed	9	4	5	18
Other Staff	Hall #1	Hall #2	Hall #3	Total
Junior firefighter ¹		4	2	6
New recruits/probationary firefighters ²	2	1	1	4
Firefighters on leave/inactive/non-responding	5	2		7
Total	7	7	3	17

¹ Firefighters less than age 19

² Firefighters with 6 months or less service

SLVFD FINANCIAL HISTORY

This exhibit summarizes the Department's revenue and expense history over the past four years.

Factor	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total Revenues	\$204,241	\$198,189	\$220,719	\$199,018
Operations	\$23,129	\$70,450	\$22,824	\$24,013
Training	26,354	19,061	22,309	23,773
Maintenance	13,208	9,755	28,112	14,673
Communications Equipment	1,651	816	465	1,186
Fire Equipment Maintenance	1,938	2,811	2,063	2,647
Fire Hall Maintenance	19,505	5,985	15,413	4,000
Utilities and Overhead Expenses	16,149	13,332	14,039	14,118
Replacement Purchases	51,843	14,382	42,642	33,397
Banquets/Awards/Public Awareness	9,479	7,860	7,086	10,978
Reimbursements/staff costs	36,123	44,759	54,840	42,463
HST/GST	6,685	2,848	5,386	8,134
Total Direct Expenses	\$206,065	\$142,060	\$215,179	\$178,881
Net Income	\$(1,824)	\$56,129	\$5,540	\$20,137
Unallocated Expenses ¹				
Capital Expenditures				Ø
Total Department Cost				

¹ Expenses paid by ACRD but not allocated to SLVFD (e.g. dispatch services). The values of unallocated costs are not available at this time.

INCIDENT RESPONSE TIMES IN 2010

A cross section of fire and emergency medical incident response times for 2010 is presented below. We have found several discrepancies in North Island Dispatch time records. Accordingly, these times are the best available but may not be completely correct.

Type of Fire Call	Call Initiated to SLVFD	First SLVFD Firefighters on Scene	Elapsed Time
Chimney fire	13:18:12	13:25:08	6:56
Structure fire	17:50:13	18:00:25	10:12
MV fire	11:56:13	12:11:33	15:20
MV fire	10:38:24	10:56:58	18:34
Structure fire	19:00:31	19:08:51	8:20
Chimney fire	17:28:25	17:36:33	8:08
Beach/outdoor fire	17:18:35	17:34:44	16:09
Beach/outdoor fire	7:12:13	7:20:42	8:29
Beach/outdoor fire	23:10:38	23:22:35	11:57
Beach/outdoor fire	15:41:39	15:58:48	17:09
Beach/outdoor fire	18:21:10	18:28:42	7:32
Averaged elapsed time			11 min; 43 sec ¹

¹ 45% are less than 10 minutes

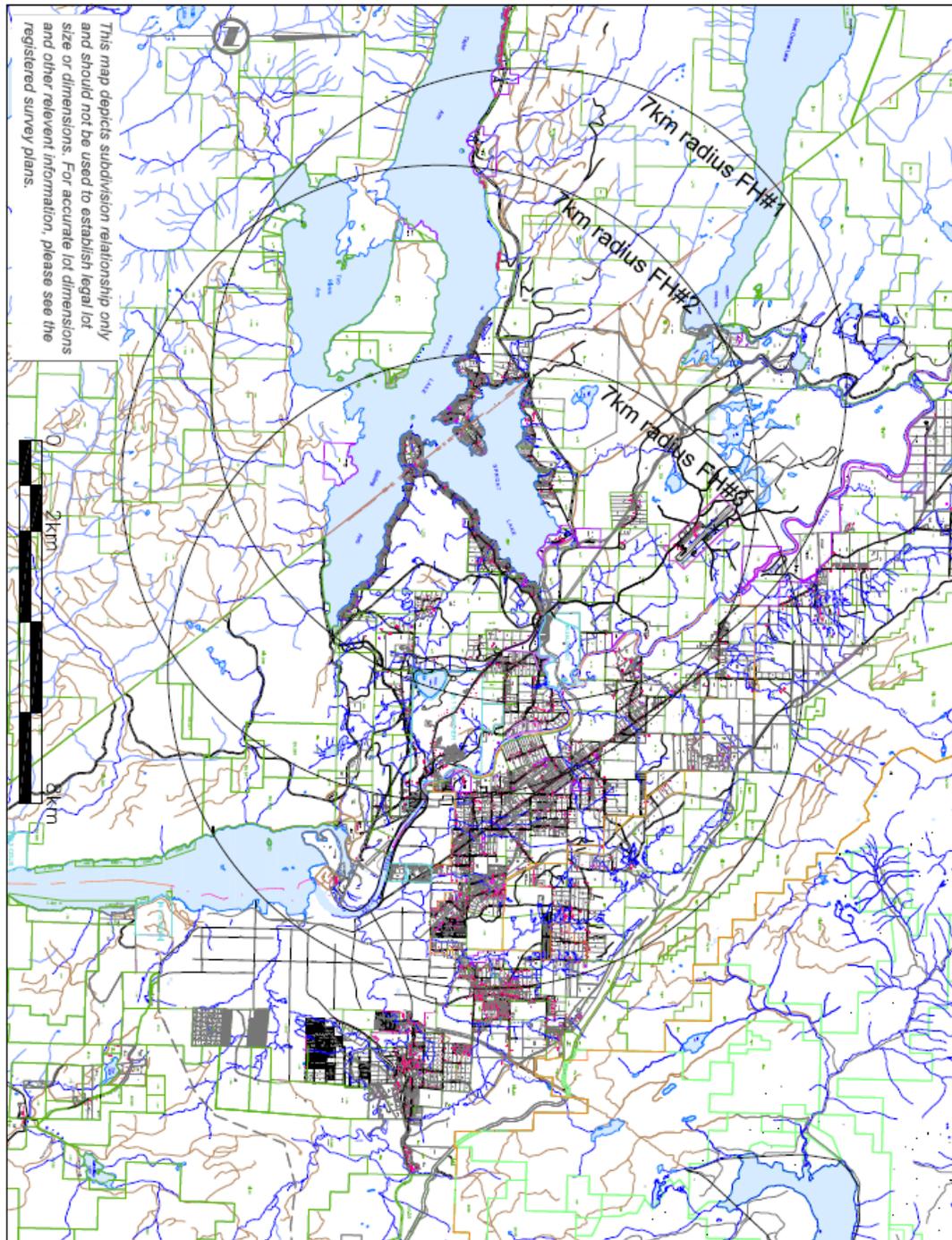
First Responder ¹	Call Initiated to SLVFD	First SLVFD Firefighters on Scene	Elapsed Time
	14:16:26	14:31:42	15:16
	17:20:06	17:34:43	14:37
	17:08:22	17:18:34	10:12
	08:57:05	09:11:37	14:32
	17:07:27	17:10:28	3:01
	19:58:31	19:59:58	1:27
	11:48:05	11:58:06	10:01
	16:35:24	16:58:50	23:26
	13:57:46	14:01:01	3:15
	07:07:13	01:16:24	9:11
	14:46:27	14:47:51	1:24
	21:56:24	22:06:34	10:10
Averaged elapsed time			9 min, 43 sec ²

¹ Every second incident

² 42% are less than 10 minutes

FIRE HALL COVERAGE MAP

This map shows the estimated coverage by fire hall using a 7 km. circle centred on each hall. Fire Underwriters Survey Dwelling Protection Grades apply to properties within 8 km. by road of a fire hall.



ASSESSED VALUE OF THE FIRE HALLS

This exhibit summarizes the assessed value of each of the fire halls as of January 1, 2011.

Factor	Hall 1	Hall 2	Hall 3	Total
Land	\$767,000	Ø ¹	\$96,700	\$863,700
Buildings	\$35,900	\$59,500	\$56,000	\$151,400
Total	\$802,900	\$59,500	\$152,700	\$1,015,000

¹ Road allowance

SLVFD DEPRECIATION FOR 2010

This exhibit lists the depreciation of fire department assets for 2010. (i.e. These costs are in addition to the direct fire department operating costs shown in Exhibit 8).

Halls	Depreciation Charged in 2010
Hall 1	\$295
Hall 2	\$3,823
Hall 3	\$3,977
Burn site	\$924
Trucks	\$43,421
Equipment	\$924
Total depreciation for 2010	\$53,364

EVALUATION OF HALL FUNCTIONALITY

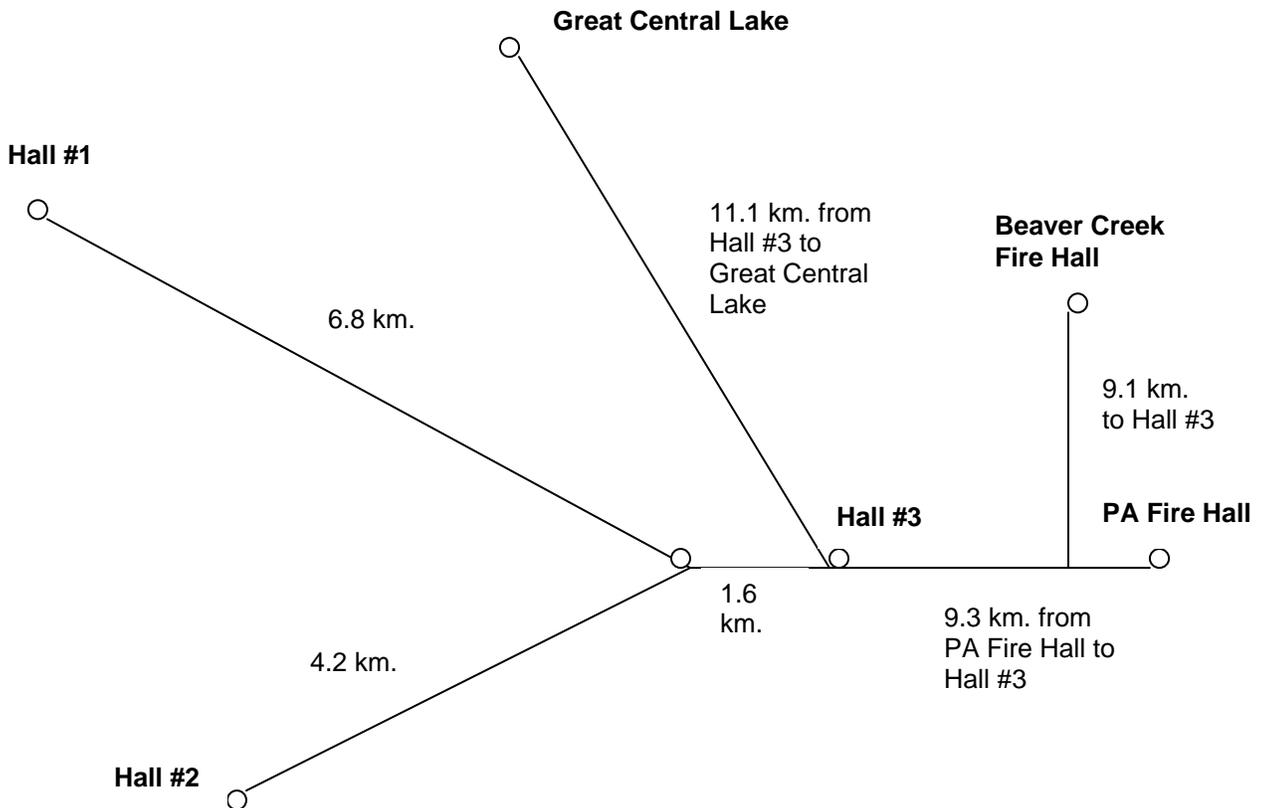
This exhibit assesses the functionality, safety and operational effectiveness of the three SLVFD halls.

Factor	Hall #1 (Lake Shore Rd)	Hall #2 (Faber Rd)	Hall #3 (#4 Highway)
Truck bays	3	3	2
Firefighter storage lockers	No	No	No
Women's' change room	No	No	No
Capacity to hang turnout gear	No	No	No
Shower units	No	No	1
Washing machines	No	No	1
Training room	No	No	2 – 1 small; 1 large
Cooking facilities (stove/fridge/dishwasher)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sproat Lake access	No	Yes	No
Hall water supply	Well and lake	Well and lake	Port Alberni water (1/2 inch line)
Water supply for trucks	Lake	Lake	Hydrant
Water storage	No	No	No
Street access	Sloped driveway	Direct	Sloped driveway
Seismic safety	Average (seismic work not completed)	Average	Poor (No work done yet)
Ability to separate contaminated space from clean space (WorkSafe BC requirement)	No	No	No

Factor	Hall #1 (Lake Shore Rd)	Hall #2 (Faber Rd)	Hall #3 (#4 Highway)
Administrative office	No	No	2 (poor)
Storage space	Minimal	Minimal	Minimal
Capacity to use for public meetings	Nil	Nil	Yes
Capacity to use as a public refuge	Nil	Nil	Nil
Exposure to interface risks	High	High	Low
Firefighter parking	Ok	Limited	Ok

FIRE HALL DRIVING DISTANCES AND TRAVEL TIMES

This exhibit presents the distances and travel time between SLVFD fire halls and between the PAFD and the SLVFD halls.



Measure	Distance	Travel Time	Notes
Hall 3 to Hall 1	8.4 km.	6 minutes	All highway travel
Hall 3 to Hall 2	5.8 km.	6 minutes	
Hall 2 to Hall 1	11 km.	9 minutes	Mostly highway travel
PA Fire Hall to Hall 3	9.3 km.	9 minutes	Some highway travel
PA Fire Hall to Hall 1	17.7 km.	15 minutes	Mostly highway travel
PA Fire Hall to Hall 2	15.1 km.	15 minutes	Some highway travel
Beaver Creek Fire Hall to Hall 3	9.1 km.	9 minutes	Mostly highway travel

SUMMARY OF HALL OPTIONS

This exhibit presents a range of options for the SLVFD in rethinking its hall structure and operations.

Option	Feasibility
1. Upgrade Hall 3 seismically and replace the roof	High feasibility
2. Renovate and enlarge Hall 3 along with the seismic upgrade and roof repairs	High feasibility but higher cost
3. Close Hall 1	Challenging/Some loss of coverages
4. Close Hall 2	Challenging
5. Close Hall 3	Challenging/Some loss of coverages
6. Close two halls, e.g. – 1 & 2 – 2 & 3 – 1 & 3	Not practical without a new hall
7. Replace Halls 2 and 3 and build a major new hall on Highway 4	Expensive/3 year time frame
8. Build a major new hall on Highway 4 and continue to operate Hall 1 and possibly Hall 2 as satellite halls	Expensive

HALL STRUCTURE OPTIONS AND THEIR IMPACTS ¹

This exhibit presents the impacts for the various hall structure options.

Impacts	Renovate Hall 3	Close Hall 1	Close Hall 2	Close Hall 3	Replace Halls 2 & 3 With a New Hall	Replace Hall 3 & Close Halls 1 & 2	Replace Hall 3 & Leave Halls 1 & 2 as Garages
Reduce costs/create savings	0	+1	+1	+1	-1	-1	-1
Improve firefighter response time to hall	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	0
Improve truck response to incident	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	0
Retain firefighters	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	0
Maintain Fire Underwriters rating	0	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1
Improve ability to recruit firefighters	0	0	0	0	+1	+1	+1
Improve access to trucks and halls in the event of wildfires	0	+1	+1	-1	+1	+1	+1
Use halls as community refuge points	0	0	0	0	+1	+1	+1
Comply with WorkSafe BC safety regulations	0	0	0	0	+1	+1	+1
Improve firefighter working conditions	0	0	0	0	+1	+1	+1
Reduce energy consumption	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	0
Total	+1	+1	+1	-1	+3	+3	+5

¹ 0 = no impact; +1 = positive impact; -1= negative/adverse impact

ESTIMATED TAX IMPACTS OF SELECTED FIRE HALL OPTIONS

This exhibit presents the estimated property tax costs of three of the hall structure options, namely: (1) fix the Hall 3 roof; (2) renovate Hall 3 with seismic upgrading; and (3) replace Halls 2 and 3 with a new hall.

Tax Rate/ Residential Property Assessed Value \$	Annual Property Tax Cost			
	Hall 3 Roof Repair @ \$40,000 ¹	Hall 3 renovations @ \$60,000 ²	New Hall @ \$3.5 million ³	Base cost/no new spending
Tax rate	\$6.08/\$100K	\$9.30/\$100K	\$42.60/\$100K	\$43.20/\$100K
\$0.5 million	\$30.40	\$46.50	\$213.00	\$216.00
1 million	\$60.80	\$93.00	\$426.00	\$432.00
1.5 million	\$91.20	\$139.50	\$639.00	\$648.00
Term of new taxes	1 year	1 year	20 years	Ongoing/annual

If a parcel tax approach is used, the incremental tax for a new fire hall would be \$212 per property assuming 1300 parcels in the Sproat Lake Fire Protection Area.

¹ Estimated roof repair cost

² Net cost of upgrading and renovations after a \$204,700 government grant

³ Assumes 20 year depreciation at 4.5% interest

**FIREFIGHTER SURVEY RESPONSES RELATING TO DEPARTMENT
 LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE**

This exhibit shows that almost 25% of the volunteers who responded to the survey have concerns about Department leadership and culture (i.e. 26 out of 105 ratings are below 5).

Survey Statement	Distribution of Ratings											Ave Rating
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
#11 – SLVFD leaders foster a team culture	2			2	1	2		3	5	1	5	6.7
#28 – SLVFD is relatively free of cliques and politics	4			1	3	3	2	2	2		4	5.3
#29 – Department leaders are good at recognizing firefighter effort and performance	1		2	1	1	4	2		6		4	6.2
#30 – SLVFD leaders have earned the respect of Department firefighters		1	1	2	1	1	1	3	6	1	4	6.4
#35 – The Department has good leadership	1	1	1		1	2		1	8	4	2	6.9

REASONS TO BUILD A NEW FIRE HALL

This exhibit summarizes the reasons to build a major new fire hall to replace Halls 2 and 3.

Factor	Reasons to Build a New Hall
Firefighter facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide needed facilities (showers, washing machine, drying space, backup generator, lockers, change rooms, parking for all members)
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify incident responses • Reduce attendance at incidents in personal vehicles • Allow firefighters to select the vehicles that best fit the incident
Safety/WorkSafe BC compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet WorkSafe BC regulations (e.g. separation of clean and contaminated turnout gear) • Improve the consistency of safety training
Training facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide indoor training space • Enable all firefighters to train indoors together • Improve the consistency of training
Community services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a refuge point in case of large scale emergencies • Offer meeting and event space to the community
Wildfire risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure access to fire trucks and equipment
Department management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unify the Department • Reduce competition between halls • Increase visibility and presence of officers • Make it easier to manage the Department
Dwelling Protection Grade/Fire Underwriters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce required staffing level to 30 firefighters • Improve the likelihood of maintaining the 3B(S) rating • Keep home insurance costs low for homeowners

REASONS TO BUILD A NEW FIRE HALL (cont'd.):

Factor	Reasons to Build a New Hall
Department image/recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve visibility in the community as a single large Department
Operating costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce equipment duplication and multiple hall operating and maintenance costs
Recruiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate the importance and permanence of the Department• Improve the ability to recruit volunteers

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS / INTERVIEWEES

Mike Barker	Captain Hall 2
Penny Cote	Director, Electoral Area D – ACRD
Brian Cote	Firefighter/President, Sproat Lake Community Association
Derrick Cyr	Firefighter/Safety Officer
Russell Dyson	CAO ACRD
Teri Fong	Manager of Finance
Rob Gaudreault	Building Inspector ACRD/Sproat Lake Area
Rick Geddes	Firefighter/Training Officer
Wade Hepp	Deputy Fire Chief
Michael Irg	Manager Planning and Development ACRD
Chris Jankowski	Deputy Fire Chief PAFD
Peter Klaver	Fire Chief SLVFD
Laurie L'Heureux	Emergency Planning Coordinator ACRD
Wendy Maurice	Administrative Assistant SLVFD
Mike McCann	Captain Hall 3
Alan McGill	CEO, McGill Engineering
Ron McKnight	Captain Hall 1
Tim Pley	Fire Chief PAFD
Chris Vrabel	Deputy Fire Chief – Campbell River/North Island Dispatch
Chris Wynans	Firefighter/Fire Prevention Officer

SELECTED REFERENCE SOURCES

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APPENDIX A

**SPROAT LAKE FIREFIGHTER SURVEY
REPORT**

AUGUST 2011

PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

- Twenty-two firefighters responded to this survey out of a possible thirty-two (i.e. excluding junior firefighters and those on leave or inactive)
- Ninety-one percent of survey respondents live in the Sproat Lake Fire Service Area
- The average age is 51.4 years

Age	# of Firefighters
16 – 19 years	1
20 – 29 years	
30 – 39 years	1
40 – 49 years	7
50 – 59 years	8
60 – 69 years	3
70 years and over	2
Average	51.4 years

- SLVFD volunteers averaged exceptionally long service with the Department of 15.6 years

SLVFD Service	# of Firefighters
0 – 2 years	3
3 – 9 years	2
10 – 19 years	10
20 – 29 years	4
30 – 39 years	2
40 and over years	1
Average	15.6 years

PLANS TO STAY WITH THE DEPARTMENT

On average, survey participants plan to remain with SLVFD 9 more years.

DISTANCE FROM THE HALL

On average, survey respondents lived 2.9 km. from a fire hall.

EMPLOYMENT

Sixty-four percent of the responding firefighters are employed full time. Twenty-three percent are retired. Of those who are working, thirty-five percent reported that their employment does not allow them to respond to emergency calls during working hours.

VIEWS ON SLVFD

Firefighters rated SLVFD on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is very poor/strong disagree; 5 is average/ expected/acceptable/agree; and 10 is outstanding/strongly agree. Ratings below 6 merit attention. Ratings above 8 signal well above average performance.

Evaluation Factor	Rating on a Scale of 0 to 10
1. The SLVFD recruiting profile reflects the type of firefighters that we need	4.5
2. SLVFD is good at recruiting firefighters	4.6
3. SLVFD is having difficulty attracting younger firefighters	6.1
4. SLVFD is willing to hire women firefighters	9.3
5. SLVFD is willing to hire firefighters from minority groups	9.2
6. SLVFD has a comprehensive program to orient new firefighters	8.3
7. SLVFD provides excellent training on a continuing basis	6.4
8. SLVFD provides extensive training and attention to firefighters in their first year of service	8.5

Evaluation Factor	Rating on a Scale of 0 to 10
9. SLVFD is concerned with firefighter safety	8.8
10. SLVFD personal safety equipment is good	9.1
11. SLVFD leaders foster a team culture	6.1
12. SLVFD is good at fighting structure fires	8.3
13. SLVFD is good at providing emergency medical assistance	8.4
14. SLVFD is good at fighting interface wildfires	6.7
15. SLVFD firefighters always respond in sufficient numbers to incidents	7.3
16. SLVFD needs three fire halls	6.5
17. I would support a decision to have two fire halls	6.0
18. SLVFD works hard to retain volunteer firefighters	6.6
19. The community supports SLVFD firefighters	7.9
20. Firefighters who have left SLVFD continue to support the Department	6.4
21. Employers accept that firefighters need to leave work for emergency incidents	6.6
22. SLVFD works to reduce the risks and prevent fires in the community	6.4

Evaluation Factor	Rating on a Scale of 0 to 10
23. SLVFD provides public education in the community regarding fire and emergency risks	5.6
24. SLVFD's fire apparatus and related equipment is well suited to community needs	7.9
25. SLVFD's dispatch, radio and pager systems work well	8.0
26. The Regional District is supportive of SLVFD	8.1
27. Sproat Lake residents regularly express appreciate for the Department and its firefighters	6.5
28. SLVFD is relatively free of cliques and politics in recruiting, training and service delivery	5.9
29. Department leaders are good at recognizing firefighter effort and performance	6.3
30. SLVFD leaders have earned the respect of Department firefighters	6.8
31. I am available as a volunteer firefighter from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday through Friday	6.1
32. I am available as a volunteer firefighter outside normal working hours (i.e. after 8:00am to 5:00pm Mon to Fri)	9.3
33. I have the equipment and training I need to do my job as a firefighter	8.5
34. The Department supports me in dealing with home life issues of being a volunteer firefighter	6.6
35. The Department has good leadership	7.1
36. The Department has a supportive work culture	7.7

Evaluation Factor	Rating on a Scale of 0 to 10
37. The Department is currently adequately staffed for its needs	5.7
38. Being a volunteer firefighter has had positive effects on my health	7.1
39. SLVFD operates very effectively as a volunteer organization	7.7
40. SLVFD's annual operating costs of \$180,000 are reasonable	8.5

NOTEWORTHY COMMENTS

Survey respondents provided significant feedback in a number of key areas. These comments are grouped below under relevant headings.

a) Challenges of being a volunteer firefighter with SLVFD

- High absentee ownership in the Sprout Lake community
- Too many rules, particularly for volunteers who are shift workers
- Need more consistent training and advance notice of what is to be covered
- Too much time on documenting training versus firefighting scenarios
- Improve training programs (too much on some things and too little on others)
- Officers not working as a team/having too many agendas/not respecting each other
- Too much internal politics

b) What factors will help SLVFD attract and keep volunteer firefighters

- Dedicate an officer to recruiting
- Create a recruiting /public relations officer
- Have a recruiting policy for the Department
- Increase visibility in the community (we are too invisible)
- Conduct recruiting drives
- Increase advertising and recruiting signage
- Stress the importance of individual recruiting effort by firefighters
- Be more open with information so people feel part of the group

- Provide a more welcoming culture
- Have long time members cultivate newcomers
- Mentor rookie firefighters
- Have more socials with spouses
- Place more emphasis on the social side of being a volunteer
- Be paid per call/more monetary incentive
- Increase monetary reward (e.g. move to paid on call)
- Improve perks of being a volunteer (pension, RRSP)
- Move to a single hall with a paid Chief and 3 paid members
- Greater recognition and annual awards (e.g. jackets)
- Find a way to reduce the training time for new recruits/training drags on too long
- Utilize a training boot camp/compress sessions for new recruits
- Keep bureaucracy to a minimum
- Allow younger members to do more real firefighting before age 19
- Concentrate on young adults who have permanent jobs in the community
- Keep the volunteer's experience fair and keep the politics out of it
- Be present at community events
- Improve Department leadership
- Improve team building
- Engage members with new tasks and challenges

c) How other organizations could support SLVFD

- Get the fish hatchery more involved with SLVFD
- Improve access to condo developments (getting through their gates)
- Work with the flying tankers as ground support in case we have a major fire
- Increase involvement with Port Alberni Fire Department in mutual aid and training
- Have Port Alberni Fire Department involve us in more motor vehicle incidents in our area
- Get more support for the Sproat Lake Community Association
- Improve water supply at Hall 3
- Add a firefighter on the Sproat Lake Planning Committee

d) Department needs

- Add a 1 ton rapid response vehicle
- Keep Halls 1 and 2 because they are in our most populated areas
- Increase involvement and attendance of officers

e) Results expected from this review

- A good idea for recruiting volunteers
- More firefighters
- More recruits and a new hall
- Recommendations for:
 - the number of halls
 - needed resources
 - training records
 - advice about fixing halls or building a new hall
- Keep the three halls
- A decision on the hall structure
- More focus on good firefighting and less on procedure and personal criticism
- Less micromanaging and politics
- Allow members/officers to do their assigned work
- Less politics in daily operations
- Anything that has a positive effect on the Department and treats the taxpayer fairly
- Honest recommendations for the future
- More openness from leaders
- Better attendance by officers
- Working together as one department
- Move to a paid Chief structure

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APPENDIX B

FIRE DEPARTMENT SURVEY REPORT

AUGUST 2011

FIRE DEPARTMENT SURVEY REPORT

This report summarizes the results of a survey of smaller fire departments with two or three fire halls and in some cases, serving a seasonal population.

Factor	Sproat Lake	Coombs	Dashwood	Errington	Gabriola Island	Hudson's Hope	Pender Island	Watch Lake/North Green Lake
Number of halls	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
Number of trucks	7 (4 fire; 3 tanker)	6 (2 fire; 2 tanker; 1 rescue; 1 duty pickup)	7 (2 fire; 2 tankers; 3 other)	5 (2 fire; 2 tanker; 1 rescue)	10 (3 fire; 4 tankers; 3 other)	5 (3 fire; 1 tanker; 1 other)	9 (4 fire; 1 tanker; 1 rescue; 3 other)	7 (2 fire; 3 tanker; 2 rapid response)
Number of volunteers	35	22	40	23	30 (paid on call)	25 (paid on call) 0.5 (career)	44 (paid on call) 3 (career)	30
Target staffing	45	30	50	30	40	26	55	40
Number of residents served	1500 (base) 3000 (seasonal)	3000	4000	3500	5000	1200	2500 (base) 4500 (seasonal)	700
Area covered (sq. km)	100	56	NA	80	20	100	36	30
Farthest coverage from a hall (km)	10	8	8	8	8	15	8	15
Urban area only								
Urban/rural area	X		X		X	X	X	

FIRE DEPARTMENT SURVEY REPORT (cont'd.):

Factor	Sproat Lake	Coombs	Dashwood	Errington	Gabriola Island	Hudson's Hope	Pender Island	Watch Lake/North Green Lake
Rural area only		X		X				X
Incident volume 2010	70	150	148	207	269	38	199	30
Budget 2010	\$179,000	\$164,400	\$390,000	\$230,000	\$600,000	\$160,000	\$775,000	\$100,000
Fire services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
First responder/ medical assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Motor vehicle accidents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hazardous materials			✓	Basic		Basic	✓	
Highway rescue		✓	✓			✓		
Search and rescue			Water & rope rescue	Low angle rescue			Rope rescue	
Wildfire assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Public education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Inspections and fire prevention			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Average turnout level – normal working hours	NA	20	15	7	NA	16-20	3	NA
Average turnout level – nights and weekends	NA	4	25	12	NA	18-22	NA	NA

FIRE DEPARTMENT SURVEY REPORT (cont'd.):

Factor	Sproat Lake	Coombs	Dashwood	Errington	Gabriola Island	Hudson's Hope	Pender Island	Watch Lake/North Green Lake
Frequency of training together	50%	100%	100%	100%	100%	25%	100%	100%
Use of selective call outs	Yes (FR only)	Yes (MVA only)	Yes (MVA only)	Yes (FR only)	Yes (FR only)	No	No	Yes
Allow limited firefighter services	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Transfers between halls	Infrequent	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	NA	Infrequent	No
Average response time – minutes	10 – 12 min.	7 – 9 min.	5 min.	7 min.	5 – 10 min.	6 min.	12 min.	7 min.

DATA ANALYSIS

This chart presents key ratios which have been calculated from the survey data.

Factor	Sproat Lake	Coombs	Dashwood	Errington	Gabriola Island	Hudson's Hope	Pender Island	Watch Lake/North Green Lake	Average
Cost per resident ¹	\$119 ²	\$55	\$98	\$60	\$120	\$133	\$310 ⁽²⁾	\$143	\$130
Incidents per 1000 residents ⁽¹⁾	47 ⁽²⁾	50	37	59	54	32	80 ⁽²⁾	43	50
Firefighters per 1000 residents	23	7	10	7	6	21	19	43	17
Current staffing as a % of target	78%	73%	80%	77%	75%	98%	85%	75%	80%
Number of vehicles per 1000 residents	4.6 ⁽²⁾	2.0	1.8	1.4	2.0	4.2	3.6 ⁽²⁾	1.4	2.6

¹ Base number of residents used

² Departments with peak seasonal residents

RECRUITING FIREFIGHTERS

- No one thing has been more effective than others. Could be the newsletter one year and the billboard sign the next.
- Word of mouth works best. We avoid wholesale recruitment drives because rejecting someone can cause uncomfortable issues in a small community.
- We have had many join, get money spent on training and then they leave to get work.
- We use word of mouth. We mention recruitment in our public notices and advertisements.
- We use values based hiring and job sharing; we have a cadet corp and an ongoing cadet program.
- We attend events and activities in our area throughout the year for recruiting.

RETAINING FIREFIGHTERS

- We try to maintain an exciting environment on practice nights and a friendly social atmosphere all round.
- We try to ensure the firefighters voice is heard by the Chief.
- We balance work and the social side of the Department. We have also increased our training budget and improved the quality of equipment.
- We stress training and provide officer training. We have support crews for training events (e.g. providing meals, managing inventory, trucks and communications). Our use of support crews has allowed us to bridge deeper into the community. Volunteers are recruited for grant writing, grounds maintenance, culinary teams, truck checks, website design and painting.
- We hold monthly meetings with all members with roundtable discussions and ideas on how to improve the Department.
- We keep everyone in the loop when situations arise and seek input for solutions.
- We aim to maintain good morale and have dinner nights and fun nights for crews.

DEALING WITH SUMMER/SEASONAL PEAKS

- We have fire hazard signs in 3 locations. During extreme fire hazard time, many “no fires” signs are posted around the community.
- We are challenged by the number of transient workers in the area. We continue to work with the employers including partnering with their Emergency Response Teams for large and specialized incidents.
- We promote fire prevention at farmers markets and public events.
- We hire part time firefighters/officers.
- We make sure we have a duty crew at each hall to man the trucks.
- We review fire plans for high call volume areas in case an incident occurs.

CHALLENGES OF MULTIPLE HALLS

- The halls encourage a healthy competitive spirit between halls.
- The primary challenge is staffing officer positions and coordinating volunteers.
- One of the biggest issues is that the Chief can only be at one hall on practice night. We try to balance purchases between halls so one does not feel it is ignored. We intentionally mix all members at joint practices and at social events.
- It is challenging to keep up with housekeeping activities and ensuring reports are completed and handed in for data entry.
- Costs of two halls

DEPARTMENT CHALLENGES

- Recruitment, keeping up the level of excitement when call volumes are low; predicting what to buy to anticipate future needs.
- Recruitment; public support for a new fire hall.
- Getting support from Council to keep equipment and apparatus up to date; access to out of town training is a problem; setting the level of emergency

medical services carefully so that BC Ambulance does not close their local station.

- Training; recruitment; water supplies
- Recruiting; retention of firefighters; funding for training and equipment
- Management staffing; recruitment and retention; scheduling management training for volunteer officers (i.e. Fire Officers Program)
- Moving to paid on call status; duty officers paid for weekends; extra weekend training for members.

* * * * *

APPENDIX C

**VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER
RECRUITING MANUAL**

AUGUST 2011

INTRODUCTION

The three primary roles of volunteer firefighters are to: train for fire and medical emergencies; respond quickly when such incidents occur; and find and keep good firefighters.

SLVFD does an excellent job with the first two roles. However, the Department is not sustaining itself in terms of staffing.

At present, the Department is short firefighters when a Fire Underwriters standard of 15 volunteers per hall is used (i.e. new recruits and junior firefighters are not counted).

The Department is in a particularly tough situation when it comes to recruiting volunteer firefighters. First, about half of the homes in the community belong to absentee owners. Second, properties are so expensive that younger families cannot afford to move.

The local shortage of candidates and the need to be at full strength to maintain favourable insurance ratings, require that the Department and all its members move to a higher level of professionalism in recruiting volunteers.

Because of the scarcity of firefighting candidates, SLVFD needs to have processes in place that provide a continuing flow of good recruits.

This manual has been prepared to assist Department members in rebuilding the volunteer firefighter staff and to provide strategies and processes to keep staff levels up and offset natural attrition that continually works to reduce the size of the group.

We have written in a direct style to make the manual easy to understand and to make it clear that coordinated and innovative effort is required to be successful in the recruitment process.

It will be easy if there were a few “silver bullets” or great ideas that would fix the challenge of recruiting new firefighters. Unfortunately, like fighting a major structure fire, well-defined processes need to be in place so that all members of the Department have roles in “extinguishing” the problem.

It will likely take two years to fully implement the recruitment policies and processes presented in this manual.

RECRUITING POLICY

SLVFD needs a formal recruiting policy in its Operating Guidelines (OG). The recruiting policy should include the following points.

- Recruiting is a continuous never ending process
- New recruits are essential to the health and success of the Department
- Recruits bring new skills, challenges and knowledge that will make the Department better
- Recruits are not always perfectly aligned with Department needs (e.g. availability during normal working hours) but can still play important roles in the fire service
- Every member of the Department needs to contribute to recruitment and development of new members
- A single officer is responsible for managing the recruitment process

RECRUITING TARGET

The Department should set an annual target for adding new volunteers.

For the next two years, the Department needs to recruit an average of one new volunteer per month (i.e. 24 recruits by July 2013). This level of recruiting provides for:

- rebuilding the number of volunteer members
- loss of volunteers through normal attrition (i.e. retirements, health issues, moving out of the community)
- withdrawal of some new recruits who are not able to meet the requirements of firefighting for SLVFD

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RECRUITING

The Department should appoint an officer (e.g. Staffing Officer) whose focus will be to manage the volunteer recruitment process and bring new recruits to the Department.

Department officers and OG policies should also be clear that every member of SLVFD is responsible in his or her own way, for supporting recruitment processes and delivering recruitment success.

DIVISION AND DELEGATION OF RECRUITING TASKS

In line with having all SLVFD firefighters responsible for helping with recruitment, it makes sense to assign specific responsibilities among Department members. Recruitment and support roles that can be assumed by Department members include:

- identifying firefighter candidates
- inviting candidates to become volunteer firefighters
- welcoming candidates who are exploring the volunteer firefighter role
- mentoring, coaching and supporting candidates and new firefighters
- demonstrating that older, long service Department member want new volunteers in the Department
- providing candidates and new recruits with good experiences
- promoting the value of volunteer firefighting in the community
- seeing firefighting through the eyes of new recruits and relearning skills from the experiences of new firefighters
- explaining SLVFD operational guidelines
- being a buddy/mentor to candidates
- providing helpful performance feedback and training support to new recruits
- leaving politics and uncivil behaviour at the fire hall door

TIMING OF RECRUITMENT

SLVFD recruiting is a year round process.

CATEGORIES OF RECRUITS

In managing the recruiting process, the Staffing Officer should group candidates into several categories. Examples of such clustering are listed below:

- Prime candidate – 19 to 50 years of age living in the community
- Long term candidate – will take some time to decide to become a firefighter/needs convincing
- Candidate with limitations (e.g. unable to drive, using SCBA gear, use a ladder)

- Repeat candidate – was considered for SLVFD some time ago
- Candidate living outside the community

Each of these candidate groups needs to be developed continuously.

A prime goal of the recruiting process is to continually identify candidates so that there are always 3 to 6 recruits being considered.

TARGET VOLUNTEER PROFILE

The Department needs to develop a target candidate profile that fits the community, i.e.:

- 50 to 70 years of age
- Good physical condition
- Resident in the community (ideally)
- Reasonable call out availability

The Department should also consider its recruiting profile for candidates who do not live in Sproat Lake. This profile would likely have the following focus:

- Younger age
- Experience/knowledge relating to firefighting and/or emergency medical skills
- Some knowledge of the Sproat Lake community

RECRUITING OUT OF AREA VOLUNTEERS

The Department needs to back up its “in community” recruiting program by selectively searching for candidates outside the area.

In these cases, Department members should be looking for a more traditional candidate in terms of:

- Age – 20-50 years of age
- Some related emergency or service experience
- A strong connection to the Sproat Lake area
- Reasonable availability, say, from Port Alberni

RECRUIT ASSESSMENT QUALIFICATIONS

Once recruiting qualifications/standards/preferences are developed, candidates can be evaluated compared to the ideal volunteer firefighters.

Qualifications which the Department should consider are outlined below:

- Affability – able to get along with others – firefighters and incident victims
- Ability – able to get things done
- Availability – reasonably available for page outs
- Dexterity
- Stamina
- Strength
- Good driving record

THINGS TO AVOID

In evaluating and selecting firefighters, we need to determine what types of people and behaviours that we want to avoid. Examples of such characteristics could include:

- Bullying
- Impulsiveness
- Lack of team play
- Unwillingness to listen
- Arrogance
- Poor interpersonal skills

AUXILIARY MEMBERS

The Department needs to decide if it wants to add auxiliary members who supplement firefighting roles. For example, the Pender Island Fire Department has more auxiliary members than firefighters. These additional members work at tasks from website development to cooking for fire department events.

Auxiliaries could provide support to SLVFD in the following roles:

- Light maintenance work on truck and firefighter equipment
- Washing trucks and turnout gear after training and events
- Cooking for incidents and socials
- Raising firefighters' awareness and managing fund raising events

- Writing promotional material on the Department and its activities and volunteers
- Supporting spouses of firefighters who are concerned about firefighter safety and risks
- Promoting wildfire safety and prevention in the community
- Maintaining Department records (e.g. training, attendance)
- Researching firefighting issues specific to the Sproat Lake community
- Coordinating testing of Department equipment (e.g. ladders)
- Filling air bottles (i.e. delivery and retrieval of bottles)
- Developing website materials

RECRUITMENT TRAINING

Most of us are not natural recruiters. And if we expect all Department members to contribute to the recruiting process, it makes sense to provide some support training. Accordingly, SLVFD should contract with a not for profit recruitment specialist to improve volunteer “hunting” skills.

Possible topics of training sessions include:

- Identifying and utilizing opportunities to “pitch” volunteer firefighting
- How to ask people to be a volunteer firefighter
- Interviewing and assessment skills
- Overcoming being turned down by a candidate
- Countering objections to becoming a firefighters
- Identifying and overcoming recruiting assumptions
- Dealing with spousal concerns about volunteering as a firefighter
- Interview questions that cannot legally be asked
- Requirements for equal opportunity recruiting

RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT SLVFD AND VOLUNTEERING

To attract volunteers, the Department needs to raise its visibility and improve community awareness about its staff, services, performance and value to the community.

Initiatives to raise awareness about SLVFRD are described below:

- Media reports about noteworthy incidents as they occur
- Media articles and interviews about the value and contributions of volunteer firefighters

- Firefighter speeches at local events
- Firefighter booths at local festivals and events
- Fire prevention and education workshops at each of the fire halls
- SLVFD ball caps and t-shirts
- SLVFD bumper stickers
- Improved signage and external hall lighting
- Hall open houses and tours
- Hall barbeques
- Awards ceremonies for firefighters
- Publishing testimonial letters from residents who have been helped by SLVFD members
- Profiles of older firefighters to show that age is not a barrier
- Retirement events for long service firefighters who are leaving the Department

TECHNIQUES TO DEVELOP INTEREST IN VOLUNTEERING

SLVFD should develop an array of plans and strategies to develop interest in volunteering with the Department. Examples of such plans and strategies are presented below:

- Holding some training sessions on Saturday mornings and invite residents to attend
- Enabling residents to experience using Department equipment (hoses, pumps)
- Building a dock for public use at Hall 2
- Conducting fire risk inspections for residents
- Targeting fire inspections for properties that appear to have high risk (e.g. storage of wood, use of wood furnace, flammable roof materials, overhanging trees)

BENEFITS OF BEING A VOLUNTEER

To encourage candidates to join the Department, it is essential to have a clear “value proposition”. Specifically, what value will a new volunteer get from joining the Department?

Each hall should make a list of such benefits, which shows the diversity of the values of becoming a SLVFD volunteer firefighter. These value statements can then be combined into a single master list for SLVFD.

INTERVIEWING AND ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

Interviews of firefighter candidates likely focus 50% on assessment of suitability and 50% on selling the candidate on the role and service.

Interview questions telegraph what the Department is looking for and also promote the position to the candidate.

Examples of such interview questions are presented below:

- Describe an experience where you contributed to a high performing team
- Tell me about a service organization that you admire
- What do you think you will most enjoy about being a volunteer firefighter?
- Have you had any experience with the impacts of structure fires or emergency medical incidents? What happened?
- Tell me about an experience where you helped a stranger.
- What tools are you comfortable working with? How did you get this level of experience?
- Is there a particular skill or focus you have that will help our department?

CANDIDATE EVALUATION AND TESTING

Department Officers need to review the evaluation and testing processes to be used in screening and selecting firefighters. Key questions that should be asked include:

- Should we have candidates take tests for strength, stamina, dexterity and alertness?
- What type of reference checking process should we utilize?
- What characteristics/behaviours do we not want in our firefighters?

PROGRESS REPORTING

“What gets measured gets done”. With this in mind, the Staffing Officer should report monthly on progress, processes and steps toward attracting new volunteers.

This report should be circulated to all Department members and should include recognition of the extra support provided by specific firefighters (e.g. identification of a candidate, mentoring of a new recruit, a new idea to attract volunteers).

RECOGNITION OF RECRUITING SUCCESS

The Department should celebrate recruiting successes regularly such as:

- Identification of candidates
- New recruits starting with SLVFD
- Retention of new recruits and their training progress
- Progress toward meeting staffing targets

RECRUITMENT REWARDS

To encourage recruitment effort and results, the Department should provide recognition and awards on a regular basis. Examples of such awards include:

- Recruiter of the year
- Recruit with the best “training” score
- Best trainer of new volunteers
- Ball caps for all in a good recruiting year
- Jackets when the Department reaches its target firefighter strength

CONVENTIONAL RECRUITMENT SOURCES

The Department should canvas all conventional sources of volunteers on a regular basis. Such sources should include:

- Community associations
- Other local volunteer organizations
- New residents moving to the community (a prime target)
- Neighbours
- Local churches

UNCONVENTIONAL RECRUITMENT SOURCES

Firefighters should also pursue unconventional sources for volunteers as follows:

- MARS water bomber base staff
- Fish Hatchery staff
- Installers, service technicians and those who regularly work in the community (e.g. service staff for TELUS, Shaw, BC Hydro; RCMP officers; Canada Post; health care works; care aides; construction workers)
- Real estate agents active in the community (consider as both volunteers and as information sources for those buying in the area)
- Summer residents who are planning to live in the area full time
- Past members (i.e. hold an old timers reunion event)

RECRUITING RESEARCH

Recruiting success in the Sproat Lake community will be determined largely by the Department's recruiting research. Research that needs to be carried out is presented below:

- Over time, review each of the tax property roles to identify resident and non-resident owners (i.e. about 1400 files)
- Call all resident owners to ask if they would like to know more about volunteering as a firefighter
- Record responses so that the most receptive residents can be approached again at a later time
- Approach every business/commercial operator in the community to identify owners and/or employees who might be interested in firefighting
- List firefighters who have left the Department over the past 15 years and approach those living locally about rejoining the Department

- Identify contractors who work regularly in the community to determine if they would like to volunteer as a firefighter
- Find ways to attract seasonal residents to the Department possibly in a more limited role because of limited training time (i.e. create a seasonal firefighter role)

ANNUAL VALUE OF VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

As part of its campaign to promote itself in the community, the Department should develop an estimate of the annual value of SLVFD services, i.e.:

Training time: 50 weeks x 2 hrs. x 30 firefighters @ \$30/hr.	\$90,000
Administrative time: 50 weeks @ 4 hrs. @ \$30/hr.	6,000
Incident responses: 80 calls x 4 firefighters x 3 hrs. x \$30/hr.	28,800
Hall maintenance and administration: 50 weeks x 1 hr. x 30 firefighters @ \$30/hr.	45,000
Firefighters volunteering in the community – 6 events x 10 firefighters x 5 hrs @ \$30/hr.	9,000

Prevention of fires and loss of life in the community	<u>\$1,000,000</u>
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Annual value of SLVFD firefighters	\$1,178,800
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Total billed to residents	\$235,000
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Percent billed to residents	20%
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RECRUITMENT PROCESS COSTS

The Department should budget \$15,000 annually for recruitment costs. This estimate is based on the following budget:

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|---|--------------|
| • Recruitment training and coaching | \$4,000 |
| • Recruitment advertising | 3,000 |
| • Handouts (ball caps, t-shirts) | 2,000 |
| • Recruitment records management software | 2,000 |
| • Community event meals | 1,000 |
| • Graphic design/brand development | 2,000 |
| • Recruitment literature | <u>1,000</u> |

Total	\$15,000
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RECRUITING SUPPORT MATERIALS

To support its firefighter recruiting program, the Department should have available or develop the following support materials. These materials will be available for other volunteer departments if needed.

- Application form
- Firefighter interview guide
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- Permission for a criminal records check
- Permission for a driving transcript check
- Sample recruitment advertisements

The Department should purchase relationship management software to track its canvassing and contact with community members.

GUIDE TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Department should develop a list of frequently asked questions from volunteer candidates with answers to help coach firefighters in their recruitment activities.

Possible questions are presented below:

- Will all the training be local?
- How long will it take to be fully trained?
- Will I get paid for any of my time? How much?
- What are the risks of being a firefighter?
- Is there insurance coverage if I'm injured?
- What is the Department's safety record?
- Will I have to perform in all service areas?
- How often will I be called out?
- How long will I spend at the average incident?
- Am I protected by good Samaritan legislation?

- Which hall will I be assigned to?
- Will I be able to try out the position for a few months?
- Will any testing be involved?
- Are there any benefits for my spouse and children if I am a firefighter?
- What is your firefighter turnover rate?
- Are SLVFD firefighters ever injured on the job?
- How do I explain the need to leave work to my employer?
- Is my employer expected to pay when I am off on a call?
- Am I expected to go unpaid if I leave work to go on a call?
- What do I do as a new volunteer when there is a call out?
- Will I be on call at any time?
- What happens if I am sick or have been drinking when a call out occurs?
- Is any of the training computer/web based?
- Is there any good reading about being a volunteer firefighter?

TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE VOLUNTEER RETENTION

Just as the Department needs a strong recruitment process, it also needs a similar set of strategies to retain volunteers. All the work in getting recruits on board must not be wasted by failing to support new firefighters. Suggest topics for this material includes:

- Operating an effective buddy/mentoring system
- Ensuring the volunteer moves quickly through training
- Coaching the new volunteer through training that he/she finds challenging
- Continually showing concern for the new volunteer and check to see “how things are going”
- Providing information and support to family members of new volunteers

RECRUITMENT LESSONS

The following is a list of recruiting lessons gleaned from the experience of others and their research.

- Never assume “no” means “never”
- Never accept a poor candidate just to fill a position
- Ask and invite. Remember that people want to be asked to be a volunteer firefighter. They don’t usually offer their service without being asked
- Use simple language in recruiting materials
- Use other words than “volunteer”, like “helping out” or “making a difference”. Volunteer is a pay category not a title
- Use pictures of men and women of all ages and heritages doing something constructive
- Make it easy to be contacted and always follow up within 24 hours
- Develop a team approach to recruiting. Don’t expect the Staffing Officer to do it all
- Be people rather than position driven. We want good people first and firefighters second
- Don’t assume that notices and announcements of volunteer needs are enough. Be proactive and reach out continuously
- Have positive plans and processes to transition volunteer firefighters from:
 - Doubter to starter
 - Starter to doer
 - Doer to stayer
- Break the stereotypes of firefighters by showing that all types of volunteers succeed
- Continually demonstrate that volunteer firefighters can and do make a difference in the Sproat Lake community

COMMITMENT OF FIREFIGHTERS / GETTING STARTED

It's time to get started. Every member of the Department needs to commit to do one thing every week no matter, how small to advance the recruitment process.

Hall Captains should ask each firefighter what they have done to support volunteer recruitment at each weekly training session throughout the year.

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