

2010 Fire Department Report

I am pleased to submit the 128th annual report of the Abington Fire Rescue & Emergency Services Department for the year 2010.

2010 was a year of transition for the Abington Fire Department.

Chief Arthur H. Pelland retired after 34 years of active service for the residents of Abington. As a firefighter, Chief Pelland served as the emergency medical coordinator before we began to use paramedics, and taught fire safety with his Dalmatian EDITH. He worked his way up the ranks to Captain, Deputy Fire Chief and to Chief of Department in 2006. Deputy Fire Chief John A. Weckbacher, Jr. served as Acting Fire Chief following Chief Pelland's retirement.

Firefighter Charles F. Whitman, Jr. also retired after 41 years of active service for the department. I wish them both a long and happy retirement, and thank them for their service for the Town.

In November, Fire Captain John M. Nuttall was appointed as Chief of Department. This created an opening for a captain's position, which was filled by Firefighter/Paramedic John (Jack) Glynn. Jack was the first paramedic hired by the fire department, and was instrumental in bringing our emergency medical services up to the advanced life support level. Captain Glynn has served with Abington since 1996, and I offer my congratulations to him for his efforts towards this promotion.

In December, all four shifts were dropped to a strength of 4 members on duty. This was a difficult financial decision based upon the fact that two positions had previously been unfunded, and two firefighters were currently out on long-term injury leave, as well as we had been funding the Deputy Fire Chief's position for several months with overtime due to a retirement. This brought our entire availability of fire department staff to 17, a level not seen since the 1960s. In addition to this, Station Two on Rockland Street remained closed due to the low shift strength, and we still have no dispatchers to ensure alarm monitoring and communications during emergency incidents. These are some of the main reasons why overtime use has increased in order to fill the vacant positions which are still needed to operate with the amount of emergency requests to our department. Four-man shifts are simply not an efficient means to operate a fire department for the needs of the Town of Abington. In addition to the inefficiency, safety has become a factor of operating with only four members per shift. This is seen in the altered response and available apparatus for a report of a building fire. The most basic response would include two fire engines with two members each, and a ladder truck with a driver/operator. Even this is well below recommended staffing, but it was a formula that would allow for a basic fire attack. The first engine would advance a fire hose, the second engine would establish a water supply, and the ladder would begin ventilation or rescue of victims. All five firefighters would be extremely busy with their tasks, but this would provide a positive result to limit the spread of fire or rescue a victim. A four member response removes either the second engine or the ladder truck from this formula,

and also removes options for the officer in charge. Now the choice may be to attack the fire without a constant water supply, thereby putting the firefighters in extreme danger, or limit the amount of ventilation necessary to remove the heat and smoke required to advance a hoseline. Either way, the ability to reduce fire and smoke damage to a building or ensure a safe means for firefighters to enter a building for search and rescue is compromised.

One last aspect of operating with four-man shifts is the fact that anytime an incident which requires both an engine and the ambulance to respond results in the station becoming abandoned. This affects our communications, as we have no dispatcher, along with no personnel left to respond for an additional or simultaneous emergency. It is a sobering fact that the Abington Fire Department is operating with a per shift strength from the early 1960s, with the needs of 2010. To illustrate this point, please consider the following:

“The department needs two additional firefighters to maintain the present four men on each work shift. In my opinion this is a very serious problem and will decrease our efficient coverage at present time. I have submitted an article in the annual town warrant for 1965 to get the needed men and hope it will receive your approval. The fire department responded to a total of 415 alarms in 1964.”

That was submitted by Fire Chief John F. Casey in 1965. This is not the Abington of 1965, and we do not have the population or traffic volume from that decade either. We now have at least seven major housing complexes, four large commercial structures and entire sections of the town that were not developed in 1965. Station Two, on Rockland Street was built in 1973 to address the issue of response times for the southern end of Abington. In 2010, on a typical afternoon, Bedford Street becomes a parking lot which our emergency vehicles must pass through just to respond into Station Two's district.

Fire prevention is a vital task performed by our department, and is led by the Deputy Chief. The duties of our fire prevention bureau include inspections, pre-fire planning, review of submitted building plans for code compliance, issuance of permits and licenses, and assisting with the endless questions from the public seeking to comply with the state and national fire codes. The work conducted by our fire inspections may not be realized until years after a building is completed, or how the fire protection systems operate in the event of a fire. In addition to these duties, the Deputy Chief position is growing to include the coordination of training, firefighting operations and the reorganization of the annual inspection process.

2010 saw a continuation of the Student Awareness of Fire Safety Program, which is funded mainly from a state grant. Captain David Farrell was able to teach fire safety to all preschool through 2nd grade classrooms, both public and private. Captain Farrell also leads our Juvenile Firesetter Program which helps youths involved with starting fires to educate them on the impact and danger of this behavior. Our department addresses child safety for the public beginning at birth, with the availability of child and infant car seat inspectors.

The members of the Abington Fire-Rescue & Emergency Services Department are dedicated to provide the public protection from fire and hazards, with advanced life

support emergency medical care, rescue and extrication expertise, fire prevention and education.

The Abington Fire Department responded to 3,265 calls for service, including:

- 94 Fires
- 1,869 Emergency Medical Incidents
- 28 Carbon Monoxide Incidents
- 127 Electrical Emergencies
- 298 Motor Vehicle Accidents
- 50 Hazardous Materials Incidents
- 322 General requests for emergency assistance
- 175 House/Motor Vehicle Lockouts

In addition to emergency or assistance requests, we also provided the following Fire Prevention, Inspectional and Public Safety Services:

- 843 Fire Code Compliance Inspections
- 461 General Permits Issued
- 660 Open Burning Permits Issued
- 87 Child Safety Car Seats Installed

Respectfully submitted,
John M. Nuttall
Chief of Department

Members of the Abington Fire-Rescue & Emergency Services Department 2010:

- John M. Nuttall, Chief/EMT-I
- John A. Weckbacher, Jr., Deputy Chief/EMT-I
- David Farrell, Captain/EMT
- Edward Belcher, Captain/EMT
- Ronald Howe, Captain/Paramedic
- John Glynn, Captain/Paramedic
- Michael Murphy, Firefighter/EMT-I
- Michael Farrell, Firefighter/EMT-I
- Michael Driscoll, Firefighter/Paramedic
- John Force, Firefighter/Paramedic
- Robert Neumeister, Firefighter/EMT-I
- Donald DiDomenico, Firefighter/Paramedic
- Kevin Finch, Firefighter/Paramedic
- George Gardiner, Jr., Firefighter/Paramedic
- Richard Smith, Firefighter/Paramedic
- Christa Prescott, Firefighter/Paramedic
- Shawn Hardy, Firefighter/Paramedic
- Brian Fogg, Firefighter/Paramedic

Christopher O'Toole, Firefighter/Paramedic