



THE FIRST RESPONDER

A South King Fire Publication

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MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FALL 2025



Serving 25 years at South King Fire, I have seen firsthand how our district has adapted to meet community needs. As the Executive Director overseeing Business Operations, I am pleased to share several key accomplishments from the past year, driven by strategic decision making and solid financial management:

- Our strong fiscal position earned the district an AA+ credit rating in August. Standard & Poor's recognized the district for "consistently positive operating results, predictable and flexible budgetary structure, and a strong financial position."
- Refinancing the 2015 bond reduces the levy rate in 2026 and is expected to save taxpayers \$1.9 million over the remaining life of the bond.
- Upholding public trust, we adopted policies and procedures to address concerns identified by the Washington State Auditor's Office. Our Financial and Accountability audits finalized in October were clean with no concerns found.

Operationally, to keep up with increasing emergency responses, we have added firefighter positions and are operating a 12th unit when staffing allows. With the most recent fire academy almost complete, additional personnel will help staff this unit more consistently. As staffing continues to improve, we will introduce a 13th unit, providing more resources that help us maintain quality service levels.

To accommodate additional firefighters and response units and enhance service delivery across our communities, it is necessary to establish new response locations. We are working with our partners to identify an appropriate site for a new fire station in the southern area of our jurisdiction. This would be our first new facility in nearly 40 years and would support the growth in service needs.

This summer, we implemented an internal organizational restructuring to support our long-term objectives. Attrition due to retirements and leadership vacancies provided an opportunity to reassess our needs and strengthen our strategic positioning for future initiatives.

This year's restructuring establishes a solid foundation to maintain our strategic direction and support the success of an incoming Fire Chief. Supported by a skilled and experienced leadership team, South King Fire remains committed to delivering the highest standards of service, reflected in the professionalism, dedication, and care our firefighters demonstrate each day in service to our communities.

Joe Ganem,
Executive Director

Generous Donation Supports Firefighters & Community



The Gary Sinise Foundation and Amazon donated \$50,000 for critical equipment for Fire Boat Zenith, including new night-vision goggles and SCBA bottles (air cylinders that supply clean air for firefighters when they're working in smoke or other unsafe conditions). Thank you for lifting up our crews and our community, and thank you to local government leaders who joined the event.



PLANNING AHEAD: HOW DATA SHAPES OUR RESOURCE ALLOCATION

For many years, South King Fire has used data analytics to evaluate response times for various incident types, including fire, EMS, and hazardous materials, to ensure responses meet established performance thresholds.

Today, we are leveraging this data in predictive ways to anticipate future growth and resource needs, allowing informed decisions on staffing, resource allocation, and potential new fire station locations. This technology helps us forecast workloads and assess how changes may impact firefighter response times.

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INSIDE THIS YEAR'S FIRE ACADEMY: NEW RECRUITS, NEW PERSPECTIVES



From classroom lessons to hands-on drills, these recruits dedicated time during their summer to learn the skills and knowledge it takes to become a firefighter.



Classroom instruction is where recruits build the core knowledge they'll rely on throughout their careers.

They study fire behavior, building construction, and safety procedures that help prepare them before stepping into live scenarios.

The firefighter recruit academy is a highly structured, intensive program that prepares new hires for the physical, mental, and technical demands of the job. Recruits spend months building foundational skills through classroom instruction, rigorous physical conditioning, hands-on fireground drills, and essential training in fire behavior, safety, and emergency operations. Their work culminates in written exams, practical evaluations, and state and national certifications.

The recruits who entered the academy this summer represent a diverse group marked by talent, dedication, and enthusiasm. Coming from a wide range of backgrounds and industries, each individual adds valuable perspective to our shared commitment to protecting our communities. Successful candidates that graduate from the academy are expected to hit the ground running in early 2026.

PUSHING LIMITS: STAFF GAIN NEW INSIGHT THROUGH IMMERSIVE EXERCISES



Over two days in May, office and support staff had the chance to step into a firefighter's world through hands-on interactive experiences. Staff suited up in response gear and SCBA (breathing apparatus), sprayed hoses, connected hydrants, and climbed the 100-foot ladder truck.

The activities quickly showed participants how physically and mentally demanding the job of a firefighter can be. Some shared that they hadn't fully understood the strength and endurance required until they tried it themselves.

The group stretched beyond their comfort zones, strengthened relationships, and walked away with a deeper appreciation for the firefighters who answer calls for service every day.



Staff learned how to safely cut vehicles in a mock motor vehicle accident.

SOUTH KING FIRE IN THE COMMUNITY & COMMUNITY AFFAIRS UPDATE



Building Community

Over the summer, our office and firefighter personnel spent time out in the community including at National Night Out.

Pictured above are members of our Fire Prevention Team.



Operation Warm

In early November, our firefighters teamed up with volunteers to distribute brand-new coats to kids in King County. Every child deserves to be warm, and seeing their smiles made our firefighters day.

Our special guest, fire dog Sparky, stopped by for high-fives (or paw-fives) and fire safety reminders. We'd like to extend a big thank you to everyone that supported Operation Warm.

Welcome Eric Kiphart to the Community Affairs Office!

We are excited to welcome Eric Kiphart into the Community Affairs Office.

Kiphart brings 23 years of firefighter experience with South King Fire. We are thrilled to have him join our team to help engage and serve our communities.

"I'm excited to join the Community Affairs team and engage with our community," Kiphart said. "Together with our new Public Educator, we'll be able to share more stories about the positive work happening across the district."

We also want to express our appreciation to Captain Brad Chaney for his service in the Community Affairs role. He contributed to our community engagement efforts and will continue to make a difference at South King Fire as a Captain in our front-line operations.

Please join us in welcoming Eric Kiphart to the Community Affairs team.

PUT A FREEZE ON WINTER HOLIDAY FIRES WITH THESE SIMPLE SAFETY STEPS

It's fun to decorate for the winter holidays, but holiday decorations can increase your risk for a home fire. As you deck the halls this season, be fire smart.



Did you know?

Nearly half of holiday decoration fires happen because decorations are placed too close to a heat source.

Follow these safety tips to keep you and your family safe this holiday season:

- Inspect holiday lights each year before you put them up. Throw away light strands with frayed or pinched wires.
- Water your Christmas tree every day. A dry tree is dangerous because it can catch on fire easily.
- Make sure your tree is at least 3 feet away from heat sources like fireplaces, radiators, space heaters, candles, or heat vents.
- Consider using battery-operated flameless candles, which can look and smell like real candles.
- If you do use lit candles, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be knocked down easily.

Source: <https://www.usfa.fema.gov>

SANTA PARADE IS BACK FOR ITS SIXTH YEAR TO BRING CHEER, COLLECT FOOD DONATIONS



Santa and your South King Fire personnel are out spreading holiday cheer throughout our communities. With festive lights, music, and plenty of smiles, we are also collecting canned food donations to support local food banks and help families in need.

Santa's Schedule

The Santa Parade is taking place on December 1, 2, 8, 9, 15, and 16. The parade begins at 5:30 p.m. and concludes around 8:30 p.m. Like in past years, you can find the details and neighborhood routes on our website.

How to Donate

If you would like to participate, place canned or nonperishable food items in a bag and have them ready to hand to Santa's helpers as they come by. And of course, be sure to snap a festive photo with Santa.

Watching for Santa

Want to know where Santa is headed next? Scan the QR Code to the right for dates, times, and maps of each route.



In 2024, we collected over 3,000 pounds of food for our local food banks. This year, with your help, we hope to bring in over 5,000 pounds!



HOLIDAY TOY DRIVE

Another way to bring cheer to children in our communities this season is by supporting FW Cares for Kids' Toy Collection.

Now through December 22, all South King Fire stations are accepting new, unwrapped toy donations.

Let's continue coming together to make this season bright for everyone!

SOUTH KING

SKF provides complimentary blood pressure checks and fire station tours upon appointment.

STATION 62 - HEADQUARTERS
31617 1st Avenue South
Federal Way, WA 98003
253-839-6234
Business Hours: 8-4 M-F



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