



Volume 19 Issue 5
May, 2026



Feature Stories

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2026 STATISTICS

April 1 — April 30

District Average Response Time:

10 min. 08 sec.

Responses by Type:

Fire: 7

EMS: 323

Other: 122



Proudly serving the communities of Blaine, Birch Bay, Custer, Laurel and the unincorporated areas of Lynden & Bellingham

Whatcom County Fire District 21 (NWFR)

“Providing Quality Service for a Safe Community”

District Growth

by Chief Van der Veen



How Emergency Response Has Changed Over the Last Decade

Over the past ten years, emergency response has evolved as communities across northern Whatcom County have grown and their emergency needs have changed. While the fire service's mission remains the same, the types and frequency of calls firefighters handle today are very different from a decade ago.

A Significant Increase in Emergency Calls

In 2014, the district handled approximately 3,300 emer-

gency calls. By 2024, that number rose to over 6,000 calls annually, representing a nearly 79 percent increase over ten years. This growth reflects higher demand across all service categories, including medical emergencies, fires, vehicle accidents, alarms, and public assistance calls.

Emergency calls now occur more steadily throughout the day and across the district instead of in isolated spikes. As a result, emergency services are activated more frequently and more evenly over time.

Medical Calls Now Dominate Response Activity

One of the most notable changes has been the rise in emergency medical responses. Medical calls now account for about 71 percent of all emergency incidents handled by the district. These calls often involve patient assessment, treatment, stabilization, and occasionally transport to the local hospital.

While fire suppression remains a core responsibility, structural fires now account

for a smaller share of responses than in past decades, reflecting broader nationwide trends in fire districts.

Overlapping Emergencies Are More Common

Higher call volumes lead to more overlapping emergencies. Recently, about 30 percent of incidents have coincided with another ongoing call. When multiple emergencies occur simultaneously, dispatchers and responders coordinate resources to ensure the closest appropriate units are dispatched, sometimes with assistance from neighboring agencies.

Managing overlapping calls has become a common part of daily operations rather than a rare event.

Expanded Training and Operational Readiness

As the scope of emergencies has expanded, so have the training requirements. Firefighters today hold certifications and skills across various areas, including emergency medical services, fire suppression, rescue operations,

continued on pg. 2

District Growth cont.

North Whatcom Fire and Rescue welcomes suggestions for upcoming newsletters. Please submit your ideas or suggestions to info@nwfrs.com

April Top Responders



continued from pg. 1
and hazardous materials awareness. Ongoing training helps ensure responders are prepared for both common *continued* incidents and rare, high-risk situations.

The Scale of Today's Service Area

Today, the district serves approximately 33,800 residents across 152 square miles, handling calls

through a combination of staffed stations and support facilities. Geography, travel distance, and call distribution shape how emergency resources are allocated throughout the district.

Understanding the Modern Fire Service

Taken together, these trends illustrate how emergency response has evolved over time. Fire dis-

tricts now provide a wide array of life-safety services that extend well beyond fire suppression. Sharing this information helps improve public understanding of how emergency response functions and how it continues to adapt to meet changing community needs.



Fill the Rig: Hunger Has No Season



by FF Smtih

This May, North Whatcom Fire and Rescue will be hosting a "Fill the Rig" food drive in Blaine.

As a service profession, our responsibility to the community goes beyond emergency response. While much of our work happens during critical incidents, there are ongoing needs in our community that don't come with a 911 call. Access to food being one of the needs that many struggle with.

The goal of this event is simple: to use our resources and visibility to help meet that need.

Crews will move through Blaine neighborhoods collecting donated food items from residents and finishing off with a direct delivery of goods to the Blaine Food Bank.

Events like this are a reminder that service isn't limited to calls for help, it also includes showing up in ways that support the overall well-being of the community we serve. This is one small way we can do that.

We appreciate the continued support from the community and look forward to working

together to make a meaningful impact.

NORTH WHATCOM FIRE & RESCUE

BLAINE FOOD BANK

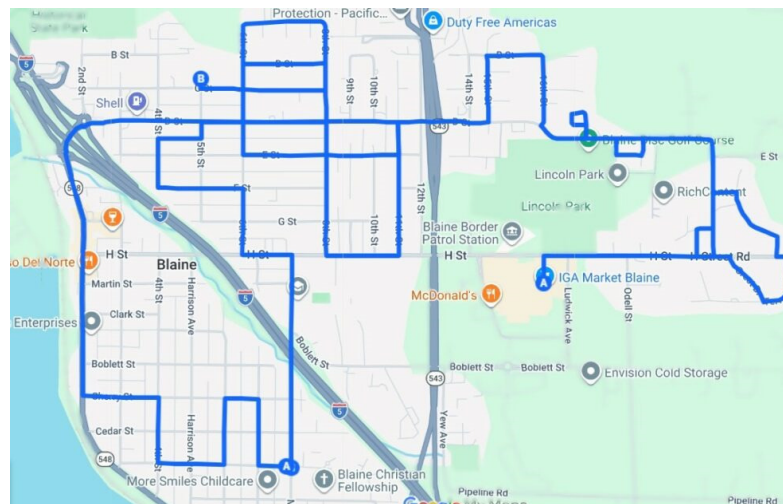
Fill the rig. Food Drive

Keep an eye out for NWFRS fire trucks! We will be driving through your neighborhood and collecting non-perishable food items for the City of Blaine food bank.

May 9th, 2026

Rig Caravan will finish by dropping off donations at the Blaine Food Bank
500 C St, Blaine, WA 98230

Fire District #21
GiveBackTogether



New Member Bio



by Alisa Bowen

I was born in Bellingham and raised in Acme. As a kid, I was fortunate to grow up around the fire service. My dad began volunteering with W.C.F.D. #16 in 1992 when I was just three years old, so my appreciation for the fire service developed early. At 16, I began volunteering with W.C.F.D. #16 as a Student Volunteer and continued until I moved to Seattle for college after graduating high school in 2008.

I attended the University of Washington in Seattle for two years, completing general requirements while working toward admission to nursing school. I made the difficult decision to return home to continue pursuing nursing locally and began working as a Certified Nursing Assistant at Peace-Health St. Joseph Medical Cen-



ter in January 2011. From 2011 to 2014, I worked as a CNA specializing in Stroke/Telemetry and also served as a Unit Coordinator and Cardiac Monitor Technician on the Cardiovascular Unit. During this time, I resumed volunteering with W.C.F.D. #16 around my hospital shifts.

After several years of pursuing nursing, I realized my passion had shifted toward administrative work. My early exposure to the fire service, combined with my volunteer experience and background in patient care, led me to pursue a role supporting



emergency services behind the scenes. In 2014, I transitioned into Staffing, where I served as the Staffing Specialist/Timekeeper for Surgical Services until November 2021, when I was hired as an Accounting Technician with the Bellingham Fire Department. I worked out of the Admin Office at Station 1 until recently.

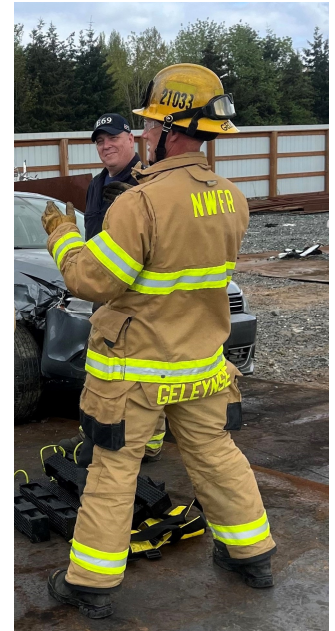
Cody and I met in junior high and were friends throughout school before we started dating our senior year. We married in October 2014 in Custer and have two children, Connor (2019) and Leah (2022). We live in the Laurel area near Station



69. In my free time, I enjoy reading, baking, hosting gatherings, camping with family and friends, and attending Bellingham Firefighters Pipes and Drums events, where Cody recently became a kilted bagpiper.



I'm very excited to join North Whatcom Fire and Rescue and look forward to supporting the team in this role.



Events to Celebrate May Birthdays

- 2 – Brian Gerow
- 9 – Mark Lann
- 25 – Melissa Van Cleve
- 27 – Brian Carlson

District 21 (NWFR) Meetings will be conducted in person

Thur. May 21
9408 Odell St 61
Blaine — 10:30 a.m.

District 4 Meetings continue to be conducted via Zoom with quarterly and special in person

Mon. May 18
4142 Britton Loop St 12
Bellingham — 12:00 p.m.





1507 E. Badger Rd
PO Box 286
Lynden, WA 98264

Providing quality service for
a safe community



CPR / AED Classes 2026

Class will be held at various
fire stations around the district.

Check out
<https://www.nwfrs.net/cpr-course/>
for updated information
about our program, and
to reserve your spot.

Donations of nonperishable food
items are encouraged but not mandatory. All food donations will be
forwarded to local area food
banks.

May 16
May 31



Bellingham Whatcom..
@BWCFFBF

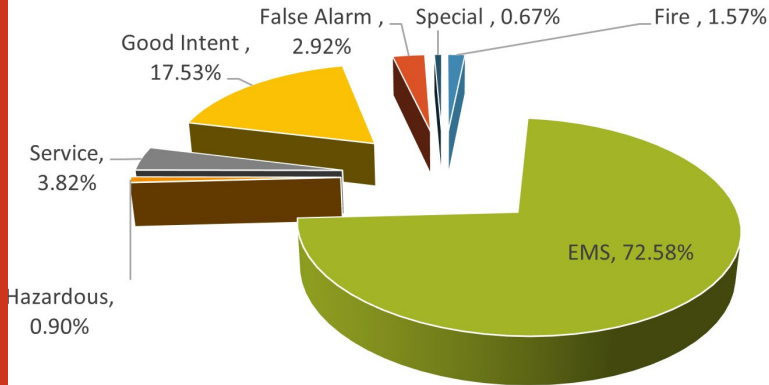


venmo

Benevolent Fund
Donation Link

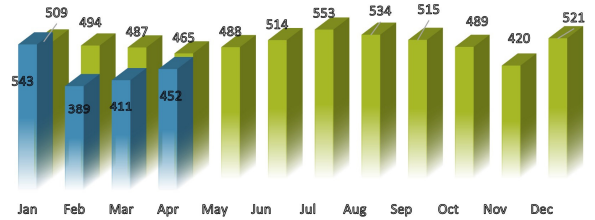
April Calls

Total Calls = 452

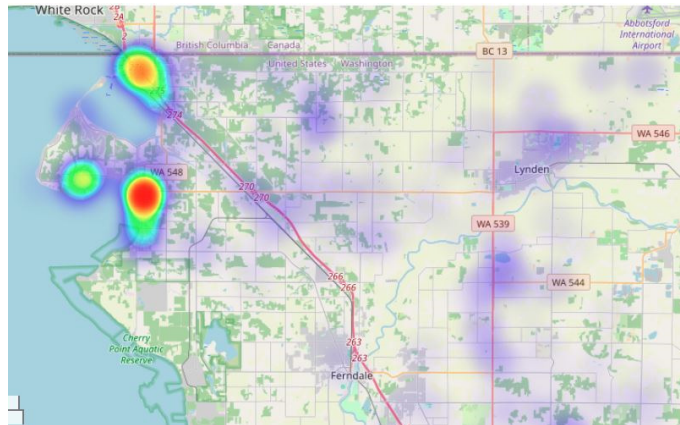


Types of Calls

False Alarms = 13



Location of Calls

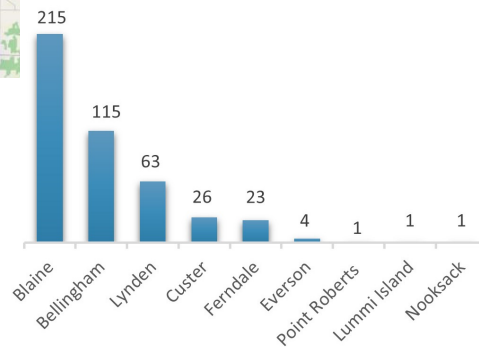
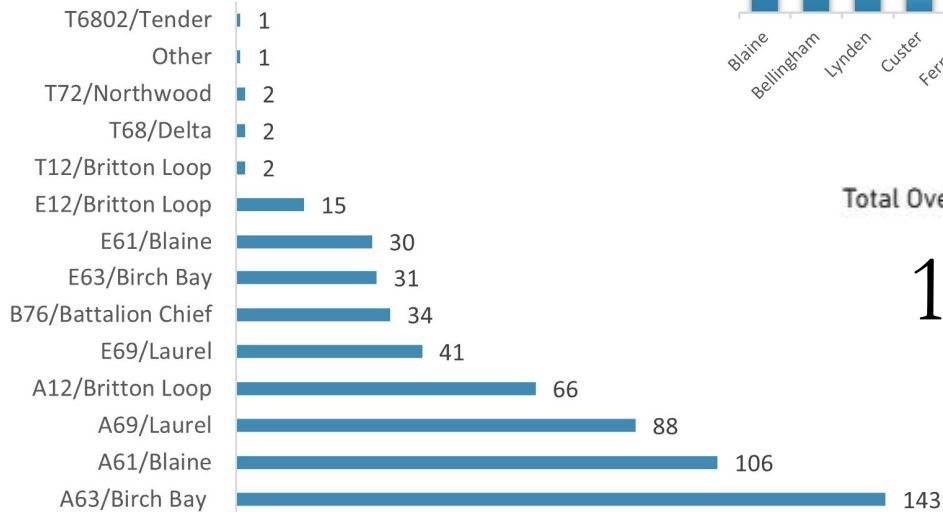


Average Calls Per Day

15



Apparatus Responses



Total Overlapping Calls

188