



Volume 19 Issue 7
July, 2026



Feature Stories

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2026 STATISTICS
June 1 — June 30

District Average Response Time:
10 min. 5 sec.

Responses by Type:

- Fire: 23
- EMS: 327
- Other: 135



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

Whatcom County Fire District 21 (NWFR)

“Providing Quality Service for a Safe Community”

Aging Infrastructure and What It Means for Your Community



by Chief Van der Veen

Aging Infrastructure and What It Means for Your Community

When you see a fire engine leave the station or a crew arrive on scene, that's the part of public safety you notice. But there's another side most people overlook: the age and condition of the equipment and buildings behind the scenes. That unseen side is what I want to talk about.

Why Replacement Standards Matter

National fire safety organizations have established clear guidelines on how long emergency vehicles should remain in service. Fire engines and

ladder trucks are generally recommended to be used for no more than 20 years. Ambulances and rescue vehicles typically have an even shorter lifespan — about 5 to 10 years — due to the heavy daily usage they endure. These aren't just random numbers. As vehicles age, they tend to break down more often, cost more to repair, and are more likely to fail at the worst possible time. A pump that works well at year 8 might not last to year 16. In a serious fire, that difference really matters.

What Our Fleet Looks Like Today

Fire District 21 operates 35 emergency vehicles — including fire engines, water tenders, ambulances, and brush trucks. Nearly half are older than the safety standards recommend, meaning 16 out of 35 have surpassed the age at which experts say they should be replaced.

Some parts of our fleet are in very poor condition. All four brush trucks and seven out of eight water tenders are past their recommended service life. Half of our ambulances are also overdue for replace-

ment. Most importantly, our ladder truck, which is used for fighting structural fires and rescuing people from heights, has experienced a major mechanical failure and cannot be repaired. Since it is already nearing the end of its usable life, repairing it would not be a responsible use of public funds. Our district currently lacks this essential tool until we can secure funding for a replacement. Postponing replacements doesn't save money; it simply shifts costs and risks to the future.

Our Stations Have the Same Problem

It's not just about the vehicles. Our Birch Bay Station (Station 63), built in 1980, was designed for the equipment and staffing of that time, not today's standards. In 46 years, it has not received any major upgrades. Modern fire apparatus are larger, and our operations have changed significantly. A fire station is more than just a garage — it's the central point where all emergency responses begin. When a station becomes too small or outdated, it creates serious *continued on pg. 2*

North Whatcom

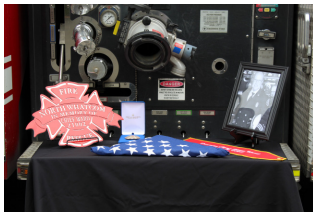
Fire and Rescue
welcomes suggestions
for upcoming
newsletters. Please
submit your ideas or
suggestions to
info@nwfrs.com

Top Responders June

FF Latham (77)
FF Witzel (67)
Cpt Schmidt (63)

2nd Quarter

FF Witzel (182)
FF Russell (175)
Cpt McDermott (175)



Aging Infrastructure cont.

continued from pg. 1
issues for the crews who work there every day.

The True Cost of Waiting

Facilities experts refer to this as the "deferred maintenance penalty." Research indicates that delaying maintenance by a dollar can cause repair or replacement costs to increase by four to five times. This applies to roads and schools as well, but in public safety, it's more than just a budget concern

— it's something our crews handle every single shift.

Fire District 21 has made careful, responsible choices about where to allocate funds and where to hold back. Those decisions have kept the district operational but have also created a backlog that won't clear up on its own.

These Are Your Assets

The equipment and buildings of Fire District 21 belong to this community. They were purchased

with public funds, and their condition is a matter of public concern. My job is to manage them responsibly and give you an honest overview of what that involves.

Full details about our apparatus replacement schedule and facility assessment are available at www.nwfrs.com. If you'd like to better understand the numbers, feel free to contact my office at 360-318-9933.

Fallen Firefighter Memorial Ribbon Ceremony

On June 8, the IAFF Motorcycle Group arrived at Station 63 at 1:00 PM to receive Division Chief Shaun Ward's memorial ribbon, which they carried alongside those of other fallen firefighters to the June 14 state ceremony.

-of-duty deaths that occurred in Washington state in 2025.



In addition to transferring Chief Ward's memorial ribbon, Chaplain Pat Ellis presented Chief Ward's daughter with a U.S. flag that was flown over the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., and the Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, MD, in remembrance of Chief Ward, along with a custom badge commemorating his addition to the memorial.

At the June 14 ceremony in Olympia, Chief Ward's memorial ribbon was hung with other memorial ribbons collected from departments across the state to honor the ten other line



Fire District 21 Informational Meetings in July

Blaine Station 61
9408 Odell Rd.
Thursday, July 9, at 7:00 pm.

Birch Bay Village
8181 Cowichan Rd
Saturday, July 11 at 9:30 am.

Laurel Grange
6172 Guide Meridian
Saturday, July 18, at 10:00 am.

Fireworks Information



County/City	4th of July Discharge Period
Whatcom	July 3 6pm–11pm July 4 6pm–12 am July 5 6pm–11pm
Bellingham	Banned
Blaine	July 4 10am–12am
Everson	July 3 9am–11pm July 4 9am–11pm July 5 9am–11 pm
Ferndale	July 4 9am–12am
Lynden	July 1-3 9am–11pm July 4 9am–12am July 5 9am–9pm
Nooksack	July 3 9am–11pm July 4 9am–12am July 5 9am–11pm
Sumas	June 28 12pm–11pm June 29-July 3 9am–11pm July 4 9am–12am July 5 9 am–11pm

*Fireworks purchased at stands in unincorporated Whatcom County are permitted by Whatcom County and the State of Washington.

** Fireworks purchased from a reservation must remain on the reservation.

*** The following items are illegal to possess or use off-reservation: **fire crackers, bottle rockets, missile type rockets with fids, fireworks with sticks or fins that fly.**

****It is illegal to modify a legal firework in any way.

Questions? Call (360) 778-5900



Events to Celebrate July Birthdays
11 – Tommy Erickson
12 – Craig Anthony



MDA FILL THE BOOT

PRESENTED BY CLEAN CUT FUTURES

You're Invited to

BATTLE OF THE BADGES

BBQ

WHATCOM COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT 21 VS. WHATCOM COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

GOOD FOOD ★ GREAT PEOPLE ★ STRONG COMMUNITY

Local first responders will be cooking hamburgers and hotdogs for the community to enjoy. Come join us for a great time!

SATURDAY, JULY 25
11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

BIRCH BAY WATERSLIDES
4874 Birch Bay Lynden Rd
Blaine, WA 98230

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY **DQ**

FREE HAMBURGERS & HOTDOGS

MEET CURLY! CURLY THE DQ MASCOT WILL BE HERE!

DQ TREATS AVAILABLE! WHILE SUPPLIES LAST!

GAMES & ACTIVITIES Fun for all ages!

MUSIC music & good cheer!

EMERGENCY APPARATUS TO EXPLORE Close aboard & see the gear!

THERE WILL BE RAFFLES & PRIZES

MEET YOUR LOCAL FIRST RESPONDERS! Say hi & ask questions!

GREAT FOOD ★ FAMILY FUN ★ COMMUNITY CONNECTION



District 21 (NWFR) Meetings will be conducted in person
Thur. July 16
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. July 13
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.

CPR/First Aid July 20



Bellingham Whatcom..
@BWCFFBF

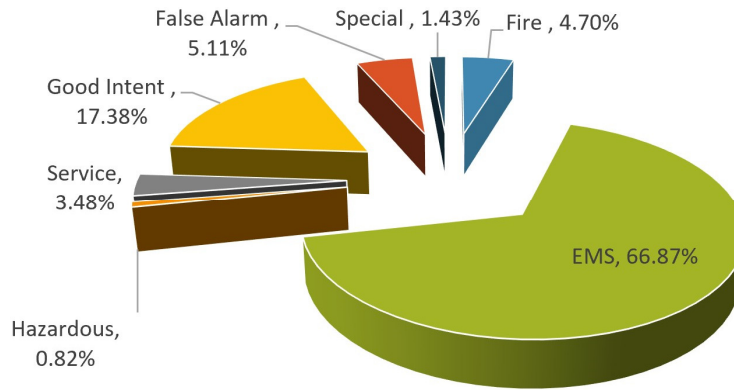


venmo

Benevolent Fund
Donation Link

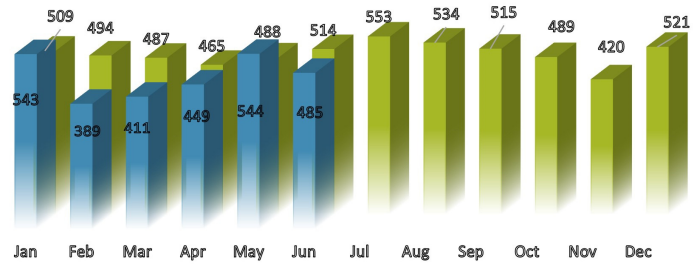
June Calls

Total Calls = 485

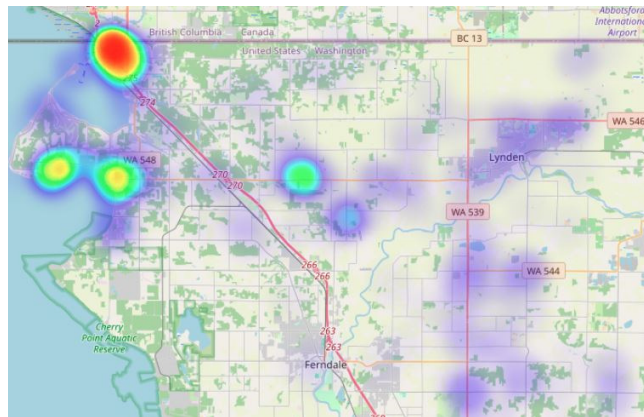


Types of Calls

False Alarms = 25

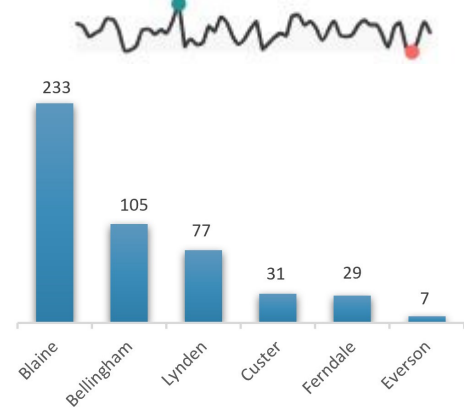


Location of Calls



Average Calls Per Day

16.62



Apparatus Responses

Dispatch Category ● EMS ● Fire



Total Overlapping Calls

179