

Volume 19 Issue 11
November, 2026

# Whatcom County Fire District 21 (NWFR)

*"Doing the job right, every time, for our community and crew"*

## Feature Stories


- Making a Firefighter
- Pumpkin Party
- Community Toy Store
- October Calls


**2026 STATISTICS**

Oct. 1 - Oct. 31

**District Average Response Time:**
9 min. 23 sec.

Fire: 10

EMS: 352

Other: 155

Like Us On facebook

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

## How to Make a Firefighter

*by Chief Melillo*

***From civilian to career firefighter: What it takes to earn the badge***

When you call 911, you expect help to arrive quickly. You expect the firefighters stepping off the fire engine to know what to do, whether they're responding to a house fire, a medical emergency, a vehicle collision, or any number of other emergencies. You expect them to be skilled, capable, professional, and ready to act.

But have you ever wondered what it takes to become one of those firefighters?

The process is probably longer, more competitive, and more demanding than most people realize. At North Whatcom Fire & Rescue, turning an everyday citizen into a fully qualified firefighter takes well over a year of selection, education, training, and evaluation. And there is a very good reason for that.

When someone's life is on the line, there is little room for error.

**Step One: Finding the Right People**

Before we can train someone to be a firefighter, we have to find the right person for the job.

Firefighting requires far more than physical strength or the willingness to run into a burning building. We look for people who demonstrate integrity, sound judgment, a strong work ethic, compassion, and the ability to function as part of a team. These are individuals who will represent our department both on and off duty and who may someday be responsible for making life-or-death decisions.

There is another important consideration. Firefighters are invited into people's homes and lives, often during some of their most difficult and vulnerable moments. They enter private residences, care for loved ones, handle personal belongings, and are trusted with sensitive information. They are entrusted with expensive equipment, public resources, and, most importantly, the safety and lives of the citizens they serve and the firefighters working beside them.

These responsibilities demand people of exceptional character. Technical skills can be taught, but qualities such as honesty, integrity, compassion, and personal accountability must already be part of who a person's core.

Finding those individuals is no small task.

During our most recent hiring process, North Whatcom Fire & Rescue received more than 300 applicants. Every candidate began a competitive selection process that included an entry-level written examination. Applicants must also successfully complete the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT), a nationally recognized assessment designed to evaluate their ability to perform physically demanding firefighting tasks.

In addition, candidates must obtain their Washington State Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)

*Whatcom County Fire District 21 (NWFR) welcomes suggestions for upcoming newsletters. Please submit your ideas or suggestions to info@nwfrs.com*




**Top Responders**

**October**

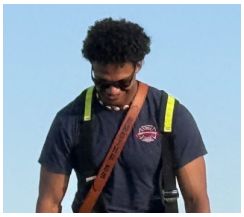
*FF Latham (65)*

*FF Smith (60)*

*FF Bronder (60)*

*FF Budwey (60)*







# How to Make a Firefighter cont.

certification. This alone can require approximately three months of education and hands-on training, culminating in written and practical examinations. Much of this preparation happens before a candidate ever receives a job offer.

And these are only the minimum qualifications needed to compete for a position.

**Step Two: Getting to Know the Person Behind the Application**

Based on the entry-level test scores, we narrowed our most recent applicant pool of more than 300 people to approximately 70 candidates who were invited to participate in what we call a *speed interview*.

These brief interviews allow us to look beyond test scores and qualifications and begin evaluating the person. We want to understand their character, personality, communication skills, and motivation for becoming a firefighter.

Successful candidates then advance to a more traditional panel interview. At this stage, the applicant pool becomes even smaller, and the questions become more in-depth. We evaluate how candidates think, how they respond to challenges, and whether their values and temperament align with the expectations of our department and the community we serve.

Finally, the remaining candidates interview with our fire chiefs. This is the last step before a conditional offer of employment.

But even an offer doesn't mean the process is over.

Candidates must still successfully complete a comprehensive medical examination and background investigation before receiving a final offer of employment.

This extensive selection process is common throughout the professional fire service, and it requires a significant investment from both the applicants and the department.

Why go to such lengths?

Because hiring the wrong person can have consequences far beyond the fire station. Our citizens, our firefighters, and the people who depend on us deserve individuals who can be trusted to do the right thing, even under the most difficult circumstances.

**Step Three: Learning to Be a Firefighter**

After completing the hiring process, our new employees are known as probationary firefighters. Now the real training begins.

At North Whatcom Fire & Rescue, entry-level probationary firefighters attend the Washington State Fire Training Academy in North Bend.

For approximately three months, they live at the academy during the workweek, immersed in an intensive training program that combines classroom education with physically demanding, hands-on exercises.

They learn the science of fire behavior, building construction, firefighting tactics, rescue techniques, equipment operation, and countless other skills. They practice operating in hazardous environments where visibility is limited, temperatures are extreme, and the physical demands can be exhausting.

The academy is designed to challenge students both mentally and physically. They must learn to remain calm, solve problems, communicate effectively, and work as a team in stressful environments.

Successful completion earns nationally recognized firefighting certifications through the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC).

After months of training, our probationary firefighters return to North Whatcom with a foundation of knowledge and skills.

But they are still not finished.

**Step Four: Proving They Can Do the Job**

Once assigned to one of our operational shifts, probationary firefighters begin responding to real emergencies alongside experienced firefighters and company officers.

They are now part of a working fire crew, responding to calls throughout our community. But their education continues every day.

At North Whatcom Fire & Rescue, our post-academy probationary training and evaluation program lasts 12

# How to Make a Firefighter cont.

months. During this period, firefighters must demonstrate proficiency in the skills they learned at the academy and the many additional responsibilities expected of them within our department.

They complete a detailed training task book, participate in regular drills, and undergo continuous evaluation by their officers. Their training also includes learning to maintain, drive, and operate our fire engines. New firefighters are expected to know where to park, how to operate the equipment, and understand pump calculations. This piece of equipment alone costs over 1 million dollars, training to operate it correctly is essential.

Along the way, they must pass formal midterm and final evaluations to demonstrate that they possess the knowledge, skills, and judgment required to perform the job safely and effectively.

These evaluations are not simply formalities. A probationary firefighter who cannot meet the required standards may not successfully complete probation or continue their employment.

Only after successfully completing this entire process does a probationary firefighter earn the title of Firefighter.

*To be continued in the December issue*



**Events to Celebrate November Birthdays**

*7 - Scott Wood*
*9 - Jon Ahrenholz*
*9 - Liz Bronder*
*12 - Andrew Veith*
*14 - Jennie Sand*
*18 - Russ Briskin*
*21 - Lane Renskers*
*22 - Wayne Sanders*
*22 - Adam Smith*
*27 - Robert King*

**District 21 (NWFR) Meetings are conducted in person**

*Thurs. Nov. 19*
*9408 Odell St. St 61*
*Blaine - 10:30 a.m.*

**District 4 Meetings will continue conducted via Zoom with quarterly and special meetings in person**

*Mon. Nov. 16 (in person)*
*4142 Britton Loop Rd. St 12*
*Bellingham - 12:00 p.m.*

# District Hosts Pumpkin Party at Odell St 61













# Community Toy Store

**HOLIDAY GIFT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

BLAINE • BIRCH BAY COMMUNITY TOY STORE

The Community Toy Store provides an opportunity for families with limited financial resources to purchase gifts for their children at drastically reduced prices. Brand new toys and gift cards for teens are donated and prices are marked down about 80%. Toys are arranged in a store-like setting where parents can shop, choosing several gifts per child. Vouchers are available for those needing additional assistance. Proceeds from toy sales will be distributed to non-profits that serve families and individuals in our own community.

***Your donations will have a big impact in the community!***

**YOUR HELP IS NEEDED! 2026 DONATION OPTIONS**

- **ONLINE**
  Links for our Launching Success Learning Store (15% off) and Amazon Wish Lists, along with specific details for ordering, are available on the Toy Store Donation page at **www.blainecap.org or scan code below.**

- **IN-STORE SHOPPING**
  **We are looking for BRAND NEW, GOOD QUALITY TOYS in the $20 - $50 range. Toys should NOT be gift wrapped.** Suggested items: craft/science kits, Legos and building toys, musical toys, scooters, etc. **Visit www.blainecap.org for drop-off locations or scan code below.**

- **GIFT CARDS FOR TEENS**
  **$25 gift cards for:** Barnes & Noble, Best Buy, Michael's, Hobby Lobby, TJ Maxx/Marshalls/Sierra/Home Goods combo card, Ulta Beauty, Dick's Sporting Goods, Regal Cinemas . **Visit www.blainecap.org for drop-off locations or scan code below.**

- **MONETARY DONATIONS:** visit www.blainecap.org/donate.

**Donation deadline is Friday, December 4th.**
***Thanks for making a difference for families in Blaine and Birch Bay!***

CAP

**SPONSORED BY THE COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**
**WWW.BLAINECAP.ORG**



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

November 8

Bellingham Whatcom..
@BWCFFBF

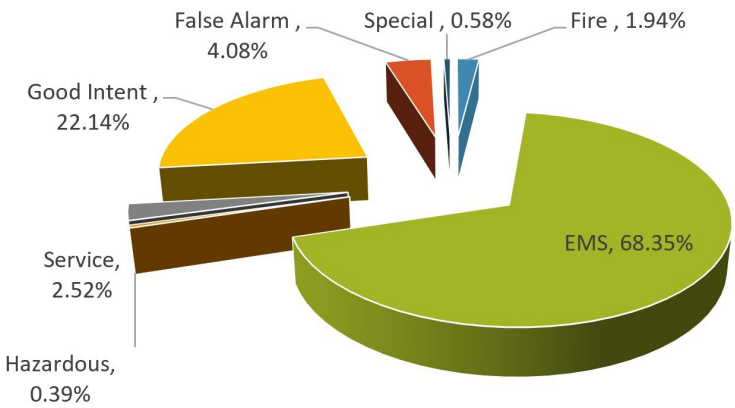
venmo

## Benevolent Fund Donation Link

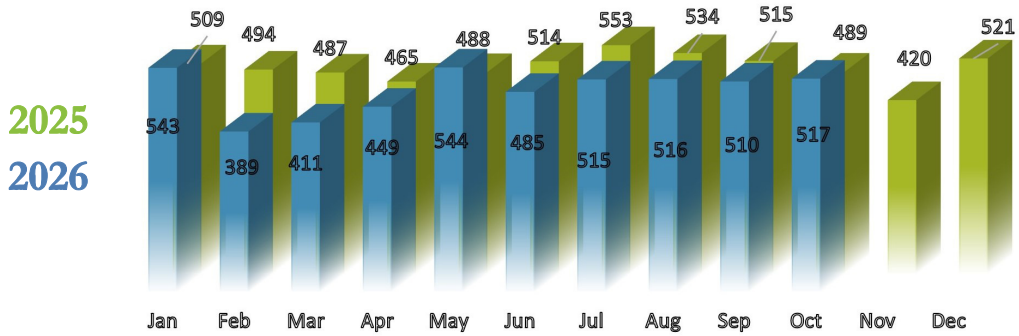
# October Calls

**Total Calls = 517**

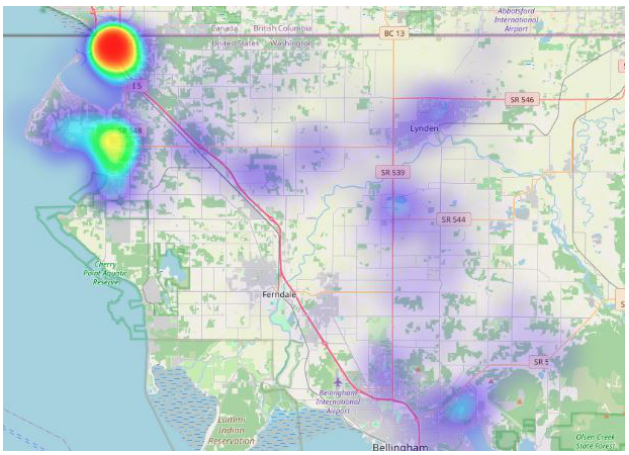
## Types of Calls




**False Alarms = 21**

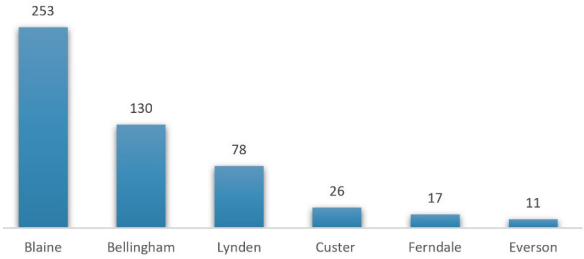



## Location of Calls










## Apparatus Responses

