

Year in review



The department received 4,427 calls for service in 2020, ranging from emergency and non-emergency medical response to structure fires, car accidents and fire alarms. Emergency responses were handled by the seven on-duty career staff.

The department responded to 21 structure fires in 2020 with eight calls requiring mutual aid assistance. As a result of the 24/7 on duty staffing, fire loss was limited to just less than \$700,000 for the year with no deaths and only two civilian injuries reported.

The fire department responds out of two fire stations and has a wide range of fleet vehicles including three engines, one ladder, two light rescues, one boat, one RAMP, an ATV and various support vehicles.

Due to COVID-19, the number of events and attendees dropped significantly in 2020 as compared to 2019:

- 70 CEMT visits
- 114 hours of bike patrol
- 11 car seat checks
- 58 public education/community outreach activities serving 262 adults and children
- 338 fire protection permits issued
- 138 recreational fire permits issued
- 90 lockbox program participants
- 7 CERT members

Service before self

Since 1996 the fire department relied on a staffing model using part-time or paid on call firefighters. In 2020 the difficult decision was made to transition back to an all-career model. In its 25 years, the part time-workforce contributed in many ways including fire and medical response, public education and community outreach. Each of the more than 100 members who served was not only a firefighter but also a resident who was moved to serve their neighbors and make a difference in the community. Many went on to become career firefighters in this department or others. We are grateful for the contributions of this dedicated group of firefighters.



St. Louis Park Fire Department 2020 Annual Report



Letter from Chief Koering

Staffing/training



In full operation since 1915, the St. Louis Park Fire Department provides all-hazard emergency and non-emergency services to the City of St. Louis Park, serving about 48,000 residents within 11 square miles.

Throughout history, the St. Louis Park Fire Department has been constantly evolving to meet the growing needs of the community. History and traditions have always been a part of our culture, as is the understanding that we need to innovate and adapt for the future. The demands placed on the city and the fire department's infrastructure have never been tested more than in 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic. The response to the pandemic has forced all of us to better understand the areas of vulnerability and inequity that exist within our population and our responsibility to act. By enhancing our community risk reduction strategies, particularly those aligned with community health, we drove significant outcome improvements especially in our senior congregate care population. The fire department was recognized as a significant partner by county and state health organizations because of the trust the community places in us to connect them to resources.

In 2020, after 25 years using a combination of career and part-time firefighters, the fire department returned to an all-career model. This decision enables us to improve average daily staffing and reduces the demands on our off-duty staff for callbacks, while also improving our response reliability during peak hours. Nationally, departments are transitioning to more career staff as it becomes more difficult to recruit, train and retain volunteers. It is imperative with the rapidly changing environment of growth and shifts in demographics within this community that our staffing be predictable and sustainable.

Our fire department includes a combination of sworn and non-sworn professionals who demand as much from themselves as they do each other. This commitment to excellence is a contributing factor to how we address and ultimately meet the needs of the community now and in the future.

This annual report shows our accomplishments for 2020 and what we believe our future holds as we work together to build a more resilient St. Louis Park.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Koering".

Steve Koering, chief
St. Louis Park Fire Department



About the fire department

The fire department is directed by a full-time fire chief who also serves as the city's emergency management coordinator. The command staff includes a full-time deputy chief of operations, assistant chief of training and emergency medical service (EMS) and an assistant chief of prevention, who also serves as the fire marshal. A full-time career staff of 27 firefighters working 24-hour shifts address the demands for service. The department is divided into four divisions: prevention, suppression, EMS/community health management and emergency management.

The move to an all career staffing model addressed the need to provide a more cost-effective, predictable staffing model. The cost savings attributed to this change allowed for hiring additional full-time staff at a time when the pandemic was straining city operation budgets. This transition will ultimately improve on-duty staff count and place more resources at events, enhancing the effectiveness and safety of our staff.

Training

Some say training is the most important thing firefighters do each day. 2020 was a uniquely challenging year for training. In late winter, as the pandemic arrived, all departmental training stopped while we tried to find new, safe ways to deliver and participate in class and activities.

Training started again by videoconference, then transitioned to station-separated and physically distanced. As the year continued, hands-on training returned, while remaining isolated by station group. The training room was set up to allow the different pods of people (Station 1, Station 2 and the office) to maintain physical distance.

Despite these challenges, more than 3,000 hours of departmental training took place – more than 100 hours per firefighter. Highlights included:

- Live fire training at the Plymouth facility
- Understanding Jewish culture by Rabbi Greenberg
- Five weeks of training in acquired structures
- 21 weeks of hands-on firefighting skills refreshers

Education



Prevention and education

The fire department believes that the best fire is the one that is prevented. The prevention division works to educate the community on fire safety, hands-only CPR, Stop the Bleed, the PulsePoint app and community risk reduction. The fire prevention bureau identifies and coordinates classroom fire prevention training and educates various groups on prevention and workplace/home safety.

Due to COVID-19, most public education/community risk reduction programs were suspended in 2020, including the Fire Department Open House. A virtual open house that included videos on hands-only CPR, Stop the Bleed, fire gear, a fire truck tour and fire extinguisher operation garnered thousands of views. A 2021 Fire Department Open House is set for Friday, Sept. 17.

Birthday parades were a huge success for the families and youngsters that were sheltering in place during the initial COVID-19 pandemic. The police and fire departments collaborated to offer drive-by birthday parades through May 2020 for many children and one centenarian.

Hands-only CPR

Hands-only CPR focuses on over-the-clothes compressions without the need to provide respirations (breathing) for the patient who is experiencing a cardiac event. The hour-long training, along with AED knowledge and the PulsePoint phone app, has been very successful with the community. Multiple previous attendees stated the training gave them the confidence to act and assist those involved in cardiac arrest. While COVID-19 put a stop to classes in 2020, community outreach plans to offer at least one class per month in 2021.

Help save lives with PulsePoint

More than 1,300 St. Louis Park residents participate in PulsePoint, a smart phone app that allows CPR-trained citizens to provide lifesaving assistance to nearby victims of sudden cardiac arrest.

PulsePoint is a free app and can be downloaded from the App Store and Google Play. App users who are trained in CPR and willing to assist in an emergency are notified if someone nearby requires CPR. If the cardiac emergency is in a public place and 911 has been called, the app alerts trained people in the vicinity of the need for bystander CPR, along with the dispatch of police, fire and EMS crews. The app also directs citizen rescuers to the exact location of the closest publicly accessible automated external defibrillator (AED).

Visit www.pulsepoint.org for more information.

Prevention



Community code enforcement

Code enforcement plays an important role in the early identification of unsafe entry points, maintaining access for emergencies, identifying exterior hazards, reducing public health hazards and ensuring compliance with the fire code.

The fire department is responsible for enforcing ordinance requirements throughout the city. Fire department staff work together with the city's building and energy and community development departments to define solutions that meet the needs of the customer while safeguarding the community. St. Louis Park is classified as an ISO 2 city, which means your home is less likely to be severely damaged or destroyed by fire and may be less expensive to insure. Communities are scored on how well equipped the fire department is to put out fires in that community.

Construction in the city in 2020 continued at a rapid pace despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are some 2020 statistics:

Fire protection permits issued	338
Permit fees	\$78,200
Permit inspections performed	620
Commercial and multihousing inspections	112

Recreational fire permits

Recreational fires in St. Louis Park require a recreational fire permit. Applications are available at www.stlouispark.org/firepermit or at Fire Station 1, 3750 Wooddale Ave. S. A one-time fee of \$25 buys a lifetime permit for the current resident living at the property. In 2020, 138 recreational fire permits were issued.

Residential lockbox program offers peace of mind

One part of community resiliency is the ability to provide resources for residents to stay in their homes safely and securely, for as long as they choose.

The fire department offers a residential lockbox program for residents who are worried that in case of an emergency, they may not be able to reach the door to let in first responders. A secure lockbox is placed at the entrance door. It contains a key to the home that can be accessed only by a special key carried by police and fire personnel who can then open the door instead of forcing it open. More than 90 residents are using this program.

If you or your loved one could benefit from this program, call the fire department at 952.924.2595 to learn more.

Preparedness



The fire department has adopted an all-hazards approach to emergency management and crisis response, enabling the community to be prepared for any incident or disaster. While infrequent, such events require planning and preparation to provide an effective response when a community is often at its weakest. The fire department is committed to promoting a culture of resilience and to ensuring that everything possible has been done to prevent, mitigate and manage a catastrophic event.

The declaration of a peacetime emergency during the pandemic triggered activation of the city's emergency operations center (EOC). More than 35 incident action plans were prepared in 2020, which identified current conditions, actions and needs across all eight city departments.

Throughout the pandemic, the fire department stayed connected to more than 57 unique stakeholders including congregate care, schools, faith communities and organizations serving the historically underserved in St. Louis Park.

Understanding the financial impacts of the pandemic on the city is another component of community resilience. The costs associated with staff, technology, protective equipment and facility safety measures have been tracked. Numerous applications have been submitted for state and federal grants to help reimburse costs.

Community emergency response team (CERT)

Community engagement in the emergency management process reinforces resiliency and readiness. One effective method of reinforcing this engagement is by supporting the community emergency response team (CERT).

CERT is a group of highly motivated volunteers who will be advocates and resources at events and in emergency incidents. The fire department works closely with CERT to secure resources, assist with training and to provide oversight.

This program was limited in 2020 due to the pandemic and the need to minimize risk to the CERT group to ensure their readiness. These community volunteers will become an important part of reconnection to the community in the post-pandemic environment.

Community health



Emergency medical response/Community Health Alliance

The fire department recognizes the important role it plays in the overall health of the community. It serves as the primary first responders for all emergency medical incidents within the city. Calls for service continue to grow about 6% a year, driven largely by an aging population and increase in senior care facilities.

The department looks for ways to improve community health with the goals of:

- Improving access to healthcare for all residents
- Lowering the cost of healthcare by using the appropriate care
- Improving the reliability of the fire department for all responses

In 2020, the fire department took the lead in developing and implementing a strategy directed at supporting skilled nursing facilities in the city during the COVID pandemic. Amy Lucht, care coordinator with Care Resource Connections, worked with each site to build process controls, infection control, PPE supply chain solutions and a collaborative network across all sites to share in best practice and current challenges.

This work dramatically reduced the spread of the disease, reinforced the protections of residents and staff, improved engagement in vaccines and developed mental health support. It has been recognized by county and state public health officials as a template for how to best support skilled nursing facilities in the future. Lucht, pictured above with Chief Steve Koering, received a chief's commendation for her work in community health management.

The future of emergency management services in St. Louis Park will likely be a combination of 911 advanced life support response, basic life support response, mobile integrated healthcare and innovative programs directed at overall community health management.

Working to assist patients in finding available resources and helping to integrate care plans will be important elements to improving access, lowering the cost of overall healthcare, enhancing the reliability of response and improving outcomes.