



# Thurston County Fire Protection District 8 INFORMATION SHEET

UPDATED FEBRUARY 2025

## Thurston County Fire Service

- One of **12 fire departments** in Thurston County (2 regional fire authorities, 7 fire districts, 3 municipalities).
- Emergency medical services ("EMS") are provided by fire departments in coordination with the **Thurston County Medic One** system using both basic (EMT) and advanced (paramedic) life support skills.
- EMS calls constituted 80% of all calls for help to fire departments in Thurston County in 2024.
- All public safety agencies in Thurston County are served by a centralized communications center (**T-Comm**) with Enhanced 9-1-1 service and computer added dispatch capability. All alarms to fire departments are transmitted over VHF radio paging equipment, cellular data transmission and automated firestation alerting devices/printers. The two-way voice radio network was upgraded in 2024 to a digital-trunked system for all county public safety agencies.
- There is a county-wide firefighter recruit training program for both career and volunteers, and a county-wide school for EMTs sponsored by Thurston County Medic One.

## Fire District 8 History

- Both Thurston County Fire Protection District 7 and 8, also known as the *North Olympia* and *South Bay* fire departments respectively, were both formed by a groups of concerned neighbors in **April 1953**.
- In both Districts, volunteers began responding with a loaned trucks and pumping equipment, parked in donated spaces. Volunteers at South Bay responded to a total of 15 calls in 1953. Volunteers at North Olympia responded to a total of 1 call that year.
- In 1954, the first firestation was built on South Bay Road and a brand new pumper purchased for \$3,500 (still owned by the District). Another firestation was built in 1965 on the Johnson Point Road and another built in 1979 on the Puget Beach Road.
- North Olympia built their first headquarters firestation in Gull Harbor in 1959; the second firestation was completed on Zangle Road in 1964 and the third firestation on Libby Road in 1978.
- With the establishment of Medic One in 1974, **EMS** calls became a significant portion of the District's business, from 32 calls in 1974 to 1,033 calls in 2024.
- The first full-time employee was hired in 1986 (in South Bay); he was responsible for equipment maintenance and responded to calls during the daytime.
- The District hired its first full-time career fire chief in 1999 (South Bay).
- The District responded to **1,318 calls in 2024**. The average growth rate for fire & public service calls averages 3% per year and 4% per year for EMS calls.

## District Management

- The District is administered by a **Board of Fire Commissioners**, its five members elected for six-year terms on a staggered schedule (every two years).
- The District has **21 full-time career staff**: fire chief, assistant fire chief, district secretary, three battalion fire chiefs, six fire lieutenants and nine firefighter-EMTs.
- The District has a residential insurance service rating of **Class 3 with Tender Credits**. Since there are few hydrants in the District, most water must be provided by tenders (water carrying trucks).
- The District's **2025 operating budget** is \$6.7 million; its **tax levy rate** is currently \$2.04 millage.

## Responder Training & Operations

- The District response program relies upon **26 volunteer and 18 career responders** for around-the-clock protection; the volunteers are organized into nine teams which provide standby service on a rotational basis.
- Prior to allowing a responder to respond to a fire alarm, they must successfully complete the Thurston County Recruit Academy (over 150 hours of classroom & hands-on training) and a probationary period. In order to respond to an EMS call, a responder must successfully complete the Thurston County Emergency Medical Technician class (over 160 hours).
- The **average tenure** of a District volunteer responder is 7.5 years (3 years is the industry average); the average **turn-over** runs from 25 to 35 % per year (30-35% is the industry average). *Recruiting and retaining competent volunteers is a major challenge facing the District and the fire service.*