

The Fire Service in Iowa



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The Past

- Fire Departments or protection areas were formed wherever needed.
- Many communities in Iowa found more than one fire company in existence.
- It was a common practice to join the fire company even considered a prestigious status.

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The Past

- Funding has always been an issue.
- Taxing bodies emerged in the late 1800s.
- Funding for fire departments varied from taxes, private, or 'insurance.'
- As costs to run the department rose, so did the expense for the customers.
- The 'Benefited' Fire District emerged.

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The Present

- Iowa has over 800 volunteer fire departments.
- Iowa has approximately 20,000 volunteer firefighters.
- Fire stations are the mainstay in small communities.
- Times have changed.

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The Present

- Running a department is a full-time requirement.
 - OSHA, DNR, Training, Equipment
 - Grant Writing, Managing Grants
 - Governing Bodies
 - Recruitment & Retention
 - Safety
 - Emergency Scene Operations

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The Present

- Average age of volunteers is rising.
- Average length of service is declining.
- Volunteering for firefighting is declining nationwide.
 - Too many demands on time.
 - Work outside of community.
 - Devotion to family or job.
 - Change in attitude.

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The Present

- Too much time spent on non-firefighting duties.
- Fundraisers demand too much time.
- Community Functions.
- Varying levels of safety and sense of security.

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The Present

- Funding is declining.
- Property tax roll-back.
- Costs are rising.
- Too many demands on the \$8.10 levy.
- Bidding wars with townships.
- Liability issues.

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The Present

- Over 3000 taxing bodies for fire and emergency services.
- Antiquated township taxing system.
- 'Benefited' taxing districts are discontinued by Iowa Law.
- Continuous funding cuts.
- Volunteer departments are providing significant savings to communities.

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Sample Cost Savings Program



- The National Volunteer Fire Council has developed a Cost Savings Calculator.
- This program will show the savings that a volunteer fire department provides to a community compared to a career department.

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Cost Savings Calculator

- 100 square miles
- 5000 population
- 1600 residence
- \$105,000 operating expenses
- 32 active fire suppression members

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Cost Savings Calculator

- 1 station
- 2 Engines
- 2 Tankers
- 1 Brush truck
- 2 Ambulances

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Cost Savings Calculator

- Average salary of career firefighters in area: \$40,000
- Necessary firefighters:
 - 16 Officers
 - 16 Firefighters
 - 20 Drivers
 - 16 Medics

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Cost Savings Calculator

- Career Firefighter Costs: \$2,280,000
- Personal Protective Equipment: \$170,000
- Apparatus: \$1,405,000
- Capital Equipment: \$1,575,000
- Current Company Value: \$3,855,000

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Cost Savings Calculator

- Total Annual Volunteer Savings: **\$2,385,000**
- Savings per Firefighter: **\$35,074**
- Savings per Residence: **\$1,491**
- Savings per Capita: **\$477**

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The Future

- Paperwork requirements will continue.
- Need for training will continue.
- Need for recruitment and retention will continue.
- Need to fund operations will continue.

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The Future

- Number of volunteers will continue to decline.
- Amount of available tax dollars will continue to decline.
- Ability to send firefighters to training will continue to decline.
- Costs to operate will continue to increase.

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The Future

- Breaking down the traditional fire response boundaries will need to take place.
- Service sharing will become essential.
- Developing a better funding stream will be critical.

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Suggestions

- Bring back the 'Benefited' tax district for fire service.
- Implement a three year pilot program for service sharing.
- Continue state sponsored training to fire departments through direct delivery, a regional system and central facility.

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Suggestions

- Fully fund the State Fire Marshal Special Agent program.
- Continue to hold informational meetings to receive feedback from the fire and emergency service sector.

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