

Memo

To: Borough Mayor and Assembly Members
From: Sandy Dixson, Fire/EMS Director
Date: September 16, 2020
Re: PVFD Operations and Training Update

I would like to provide an update for Petersburg Volunteer Fire Department's Operations and Training.

I am currently working on the re-opening plan for the Department. I see this as a phased approach as it relates to COVID-19. We will pay special attention to COVID-19 infection rates locally and within the State. We will follow all State and Local requirements (health mandates, health alerts, policies, etc.) and CDC Guidelines.

As First Responders, we must do our best to keep COVID-19 out of the department and reduce the risk of exposure to the volunteers and staff. If we were to have a positive case and had to shut down and/or the members had to quarantine, who would respond to emergencies? We cannot call a neighboring department to respond to our emergencies while we are out of service.

As of today, the building remains closed to the public. The volunteers may come to the Station, but no more than 5 people may congregate at any one time and they must follow COVID-19 precautions.

The Fire, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and Search and Rescue (SAR) Volunteers continue to respond to emergencies. Everyone goes through COVID-19 screening (if time permits), wears some type of face covering and follows COVID-19 precautions.

Fire Branch: They train at 7:00 p.m. on the second, third, and fourth Thursdays of every month. They have done a few online and Zoom classes since mid-March due to COVID-19. They were approved to do in-person training, outdoors only, and have been doing that for several months. We currently do not have a new-recruit class planned. This course typically occurs annually and is scheduled sometime in February, March, or April. We will revisit this in January and see what the State Fire Service Training requirements are. We continue to accept new applicants into the Fire Branch.

EMS Branch: They train at 7:00 p.m. on the second and fourth Wednesdays of every month. They have been doing all online and Zoom classes since mid-March due to COVID-19. The State EMS office has restricted in-person classes and training and provided extensions and exemptions in an attempt to exclude as much in-person activity as possible. In-person activity would require the use of valuable Personal Protective Equipment, which is in short supply nationwide. EMS has no new classes planned at this time. We will look at scheduling an Emergency Trauma Technician (ETT) Course in the Spring if we are able to meet the State EMS Office's requirements. The policy on accepting new members in EMS has not changed with COVID-19. We accept new applicants if they hold a current EMS certification. Otherwise, we only accept new members when we offer a new course.

SAR Branch: They train at 6:00 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of every month. They have been doing online and Zoom classes and occasionally provided some reading assignments since mid-March due to COVID-19. There are no SAR courses scheduled at this time. We continue to accept new applicants into the SAR Branch.

Junior Fire Fighter (JFF) Program: This program is for high school students. The JFF Program usually starts in September and ends in April. We have weighed the risks of COVID-19 against the benefits to the Department and have made the decision to suspend the program for this year. We will revisit the possibility of resuming this program after the first of the year.

Meetings: The Department Officers and the Association Officers meet monthly via Zoom on the Monday prior to the Department and Association Meetings for all volunteer members, which occur on the first Thursday of each month via Zoom. We have suspended providing dinner to Department and Association meeting attendees due to COVID-19.

As you know, COVID-19 is constantly changing. Guidelines, restrictions, and policies are ever changing as well. We must stay fluid while adjusting to the latest information and finding our new normal. Our primary goal is to do what is best for the community while ensuring the volunteers are well trained and safe.