

VANCOUVER FIRE RESCUE SERVICES

2023

ANNUAL REPORT



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Message from our **FIRE CHIEF**

On behalf of the staff of Vancouver Fire Rescue Services (VFRS), I am pleased to present our 2023 Annual Report. In the past year, our firefighters responded to an unprecedented number of incidents, with total call volume reaching a historic level. The rise in fires and the occurrence of false alarms underscore the importance of our continued efforts to enhance fire safety and prevention measures throughout the city.

With 4,309 reportable fires and, unfortunately, 5 fire-related fatalities and 72 injuries, our commitment to fire safety and prevention remains paramount. Smoking materials remained the leading cause of fire-related incidents, demanding our attention and proactive measures to mitigate risks. We continue to address emerging challenges such as the increased risk of fires in Single-Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings and the proliferation of lockable lighters.

In parallel, we recognize the importance of prioritizing the mental health and wellness of our staff. The demanding nature of our work can take its toll, and we have implemented initiatives to support the emotional resilience and well-being of our team members. By fostering a culture of support and open communication, we aim to ensure that our firefighters have the resources and assistance they need to navigate the challenges they face.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to our dedicated department members for their unwavering commitment and to the residents of Vancouver for their continued support to keep Vancouver safe. Despite the challenges, our commitment to serving and protecting remains unwavering. Together, we'll continue to uphold excellence in emergency services and make Vancouver a safer place for all residents and visitors.

Sincerely,



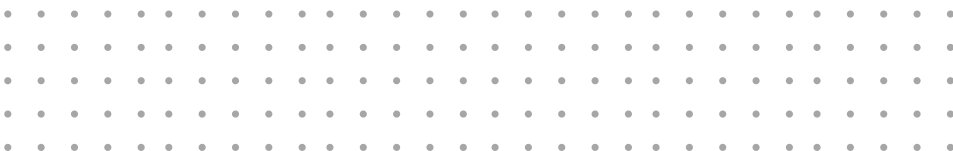
Karen Fry
Fire Chief



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*Photo credit: Ian Kobylanski



Land Acknowledgement

The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

This place is the unceded and ancestral territory of the hə́h̓qəmińəh̓ and Sk̓wxwú7mesh speaking peoples, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations, and has been stewarded by them since time immemorial.

Vancouver is located on territory that was never ceded, or given up to the Crown by the Musqueam, Squamish, or Tseil-Waututh peoples. The term unceded acknowledges the dispossession of the land and the inherent rights that Musqueam, Squamish and Tseil-Waututh hold to the territory. The term serves as a reminder that Musqueam, Squamish and Tseil-Waututh have never left their territories and will always retain their jurisdiction and relationships with the territory.

About VFRS

Vancouver Fire Rescue Services (VFRS) employs over 920 people, has 20 fire halls, a training site, and three fire prevention offices. In addition to fire suppression, VFRS provides pre-hospital care, vehicle rescue, marine response, hazardous materials response, technical rescue, and many other emergency services in Vancouver. We work to create safe communities through public education for all ages, fire prevention and inspection services, and by working closely with partner agencies and community groups.

VFRS is committed to the health and safety of our staff and community. We will continue to enhance awareness through education and involvement while providing world class fire and rescue services.



**Photo credit: Ian Kobylanski*



*Photo credit: Ian Kobylanski

Your City, Your VFRS

VFRS provides service to Vancouver's 129 square kilometres and an estimated population of over 700,000 residents, making it one of Canada's most densely populated cities with over 5,400 people per square kilometre. Adding in the over 200,000 commuting workforce, as well as being responsible for protecting the nearly 10.3 million tourists yearly, VFRS protects over 1,000,000 people on a daily basis. VFRS is also responsible for protecting and providing service to the more than 214,000 properties, 8 stadiums/centers and 10 bridges.

MISSION

VFRS saves lives and builds safer communities.

VISION

VFRS will be the international leader in fire, rescue, community risk reduction, and staff safety and wellness.



Serving Vancouver




With 20 fire halls across the city of Vancouver, VFRS helps to ensure a safe community for all our residents and visitors.

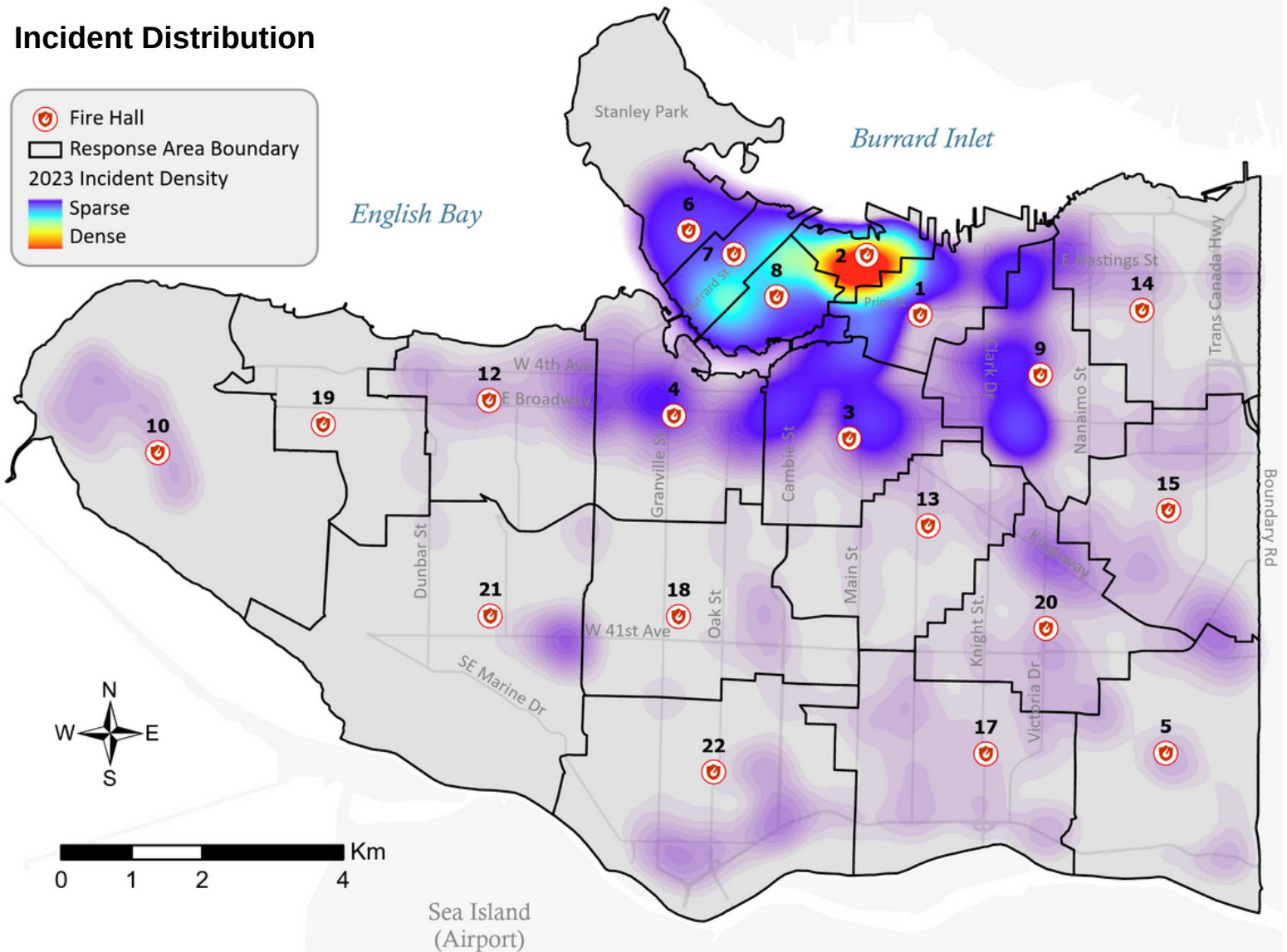
A bustling downtown and business district as well as increasing density means that fire station placement and accessibility are crucial for a timely response.

If you've ever wondered which station serves your area, check out the map below!

**Photo credit: Ian Kobylanski*

Incident Distribution

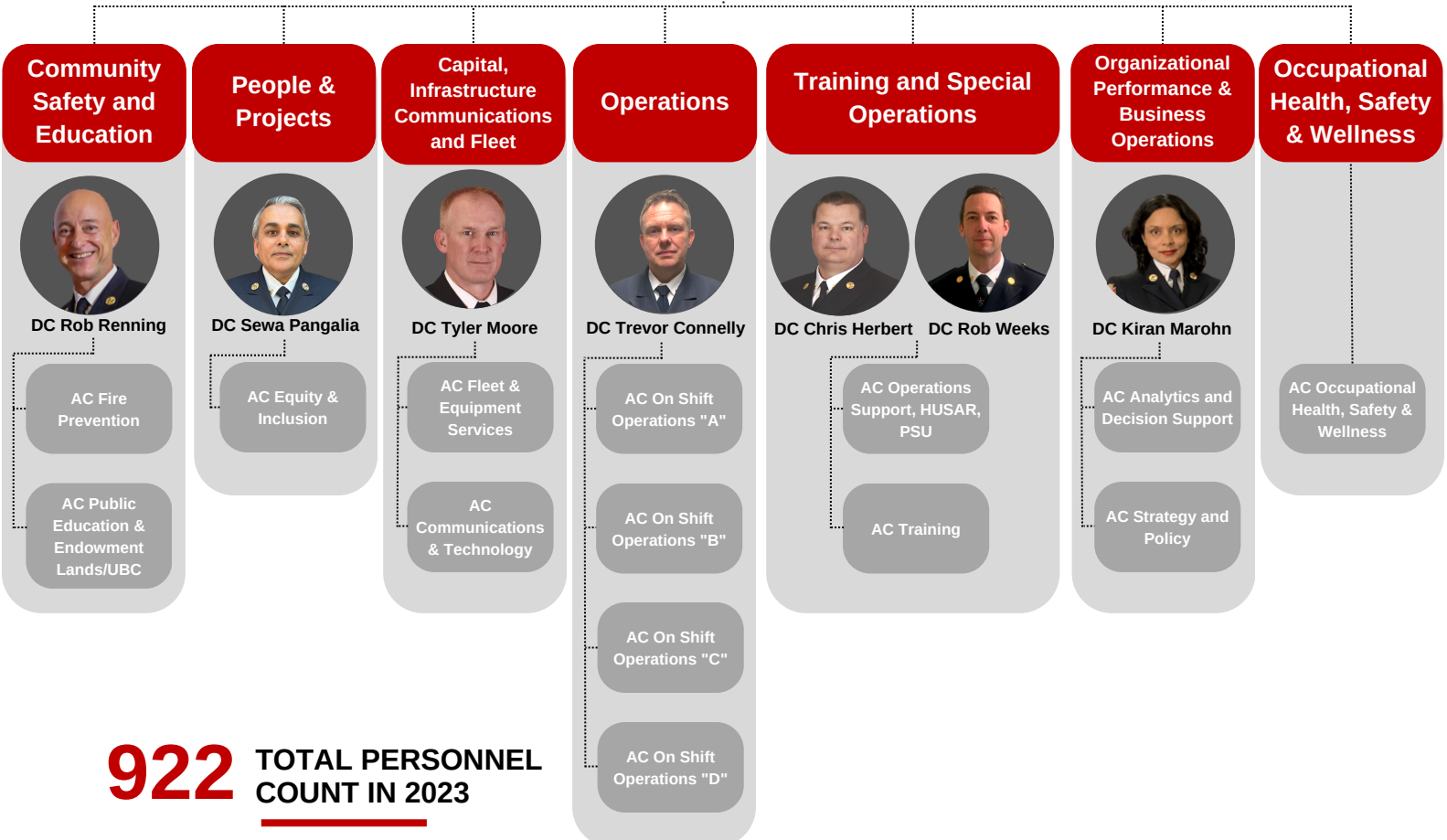
-  Fire Hall
-  Response Area Boundary
- 2023 Incident Density
-  Sparse
Dense



DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW



Fire Chief Karen Fry



922 TOTAL PERSONNEL COUNT IN 2023

- 21 | Chiefs
- 824 | Operations
- 32 | Prevention & Public Education
- 12 | Fleet Maintenance
- 13 | Training & Recruitment
- 14 | Administration & Support
- 6 | Other

2023 BY THE NUMBERS

*Compared to 2022



72,496 Calls for Service
UP 10%

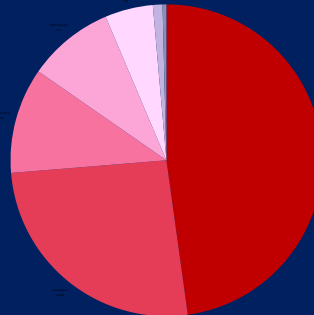


6m 46s Emergency Response Time
DOWN 19s

90th Percentile

*All incident types first on scene

**Response = Turnout + Travel



- Medical - 48%
- Fire & Alarm - 26%
- Assist & Other - 11%
- Public Service - 9%
- MVI & Rescue - 5%
- Hazard - <1%
- Hazmat - <1%



Medical Response Time

6m 51s
DOWN 19s

First on scene for emergency



Life Safety Inspections

19,468
UP 5%



Fires per 1,000 Population

6.1
UP 19%



Fire Response Time

6m 28s
DOWN 15s

First on scene for emergency



Violations per Total Inspections

11.9%
UP 1.9%



Fires Confined to Area of Origin

21.1%
UP 1.6%

100,653

APPARATUS
RESPONSES

8,937

OVERDOSE/
POISONING CALLS

14,710

RESPONSES TO
FALSE ALARMS

4,309

REPORTABLE
FIRES



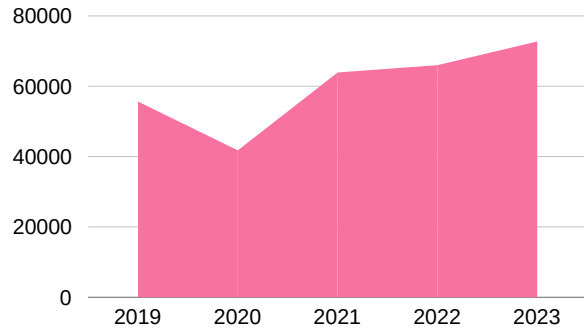


FIRE AND BEYOND

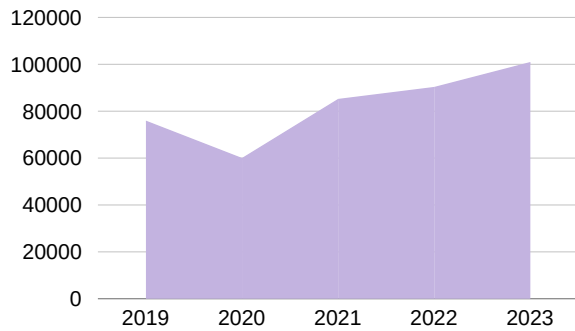
102 INCIDENTS PER
1,000 RESIDENTS

Incidents increased by 10% compared to the previous year, marking the highest call volume in history. This underscores the escalating demand for emergency services and emphasizing the necessity for proactive measures to address community safety concerns effectively.

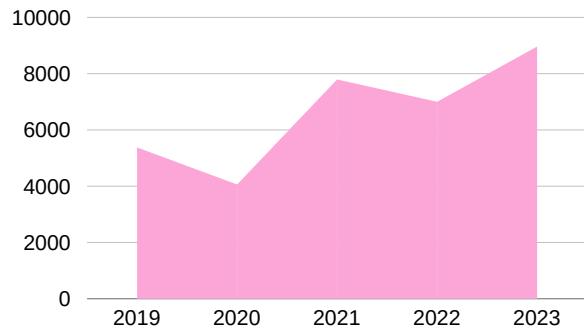
72,496 TOTAL
INCIDENTS



100,653 APPARATUS
RESPONSES



8,937 OVERDOSE/
POISONING CALLS



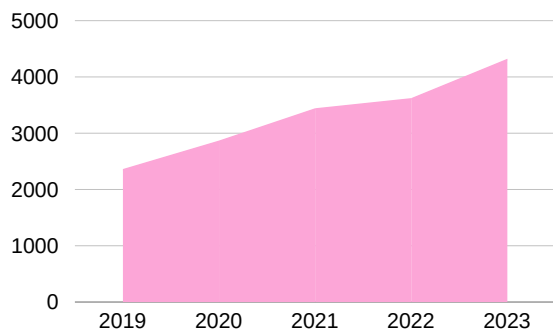
*Photo credit: Ian Kobylanski

49.1
MEDICAL INCIDENTS
PER 1,000 RESIDENTS

With a growing strain on the healthcare system and reduced availability of family physicians, emergency response rates are rising. Medical incidents increased by 9% in 2023, accounting for nearly half of all incidents. Training staff to provide a higher level of care with Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) certification improves response times, patient assessment, and pre-hospital care, enhancing the quality of emergency medical services provided.

FIRE AND BEYOND

4,309 TOTAL FIRES



5 FIRE RELATED DEATHS

In 2023, there were 4,309 reportable fires and, unfortunately, 5 fire-related fatalities and 72 injuries. The department's commitment to fire safety and prevention remains paramount.

1,225 STRUCTURE FIRES

Structure fires were up in 2023, increasing by 17% from 2022. 21% of structure fires were confined to the area of origin, which was an improvement from 19% in the prior year. 31% originated in sleeping quarters and another 25% in the kitchen/cooking areas.

2,935 OUTDOOR FIRES

Outdoor fires were up in 2023, increasing 23% from 2022. Outdoor fires near buildings are extremely dangerous as they can quickly transition into the structure. Fire life safety systems are designed to protect lives and property from fires that start inside, not outside.

59%

FIRES CAUSED BY SMOKER MATERIALS

Understanding what causes fires is an important step for future prevention. Smoker materials, such as lighters, matches, cigarettes, and pipes, constitute the main sources of fires in Vancouver. Therefore, advocating for responsible disposal practices and implementing strict regulations regarding the handling and disposal of these materials can play a crucial role in mitigating fire incidents within the city.

1,108

INCENDIARY FIRES

It is with great concern that we have seen an increase of 64% in the number of incendiary fires in our community. These fires not only put the lives of firefighters and first responders at risk, but also threaten the safety of our citizens and damage to property. We remind everyone to be vigilant and report any suspicious activity to the police. Together, we can help keep our community safe from dangers of suspicious fires.

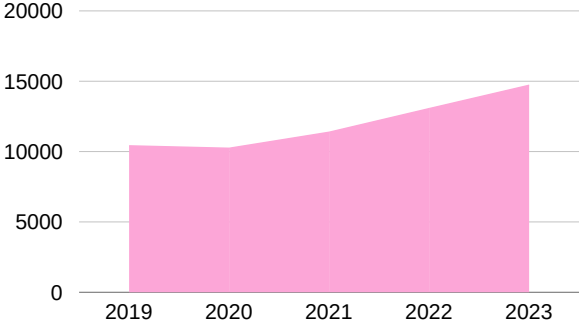


FIRE AND BEYOND

19,468 TOTAL INSPECTIONS

Our teams through assessments across sectors, in line with BC Fire Code and Vancouver Fire Bylaw, ensure safety standards are met, reflecting our commitment to community well-being through proactive monitoring.

14,710 RESPONSES TO FALSE ALARMS



11.9% VIOLATIONS PER TOTAL INSPECTIONS

We've observed violations in 11.9% of total inspections, highlighting areas where improvement is needed for enhanced safety and compliance.

304 MTIs ISSUED

Issued Municipal Ticket Information (MTIs) totaling \$200,000 with the goal of improving compliance and enhancing fire life safety standards.

4,963 CODE ITEM VIOLATIONS

The top 5 violation items were:

1. Fire Extinguishers
2. Fire Alarm Systems
3. Emergency Lighting
4. Fire & Exit Doors
5. Sprinkler Systems

28% FALSE ALARMS CAUSED BY CIGARETTE SMOKE

The rising false alarm rate, up 13% from last year, strains emergency services and burdens our community. We urge smokers to use designated areas and remind property owners to maintain smoke-free fire alarm systems. Together, we can reduce false alarms and respond swiftly to genuine emergencies.

FIRE AND BEYOND

79 NEW FIREFIGHTER RECRUITS TRAINED

In 2023, VFRS had another busy year welcoming several new classes of firefighter recruits. With ever changing needs in the community, our aim is to keep the public safe at all stages.

64 STAFF TRAINED AS FIRE OFFICERS

The training division put 64 staff through the officer development program to become fire officers and had an additional 46 write their entrance exam for the program.

18 SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY STAFF COURSES HELD

Fire and Life Safety training helps to ensure best practices and mitigate possible emergency escalation.

55 FIRE EXTINGUISHER TRAINING EVENTS

Keeping best practices top of mind in the community is important. Through fire extinguisher events we were able to train our community, bring attention to fire safety and spend time with the public in a meaningful way.



*Photo credit: Ian Koby

344 COMMUNITY EVENTS

VFRS kept busy throughout the community in 2023, with everything from charity events and safety presentations to fire hall tours for the community. As part of a proactive fire strategy, public education is critical to help keep the city and its members and visitors safe. Empowerment through education is a key focus for the department. Presentations on safety in the community help to accomplish that mission and make Vancouver safer.





Fleet & Equipment Services

Administration	19	Service Ready Ladder	1
Air/Light	1	Service Ready Rescue/BC	1
Articulating Platform	1	Service Ready Squad	1
BC/AC	4	Service Ready Rescue/Wildlands	3
Command	1	Special Operations Tender	1
Crane Truck	1	Squads	4
Engine	17	Technical Rescue	1
Electric Engine	1	Wildlands/Rescue	3
Fire Investigation	2	Incident Safety Officer	1
Fireboat	2	Operations/Logistics Support	6
Forklift	1	Training	6
Greater Alarm Engine	2	Public Education	5
Hazmat	1	Fire Prevention	7
Hazmat support	2	HUSAR	
Hose Reel Trailers	3	Bobcat	1
Hose Tender	1	Tractor	2
UTV's	2	UTV's	4
Ladder	10	Forklift	4
Mechanical Service	4	Rescue Boats	2
Rehab Support	1	Support/Pickup	3
Rescue	8	Trailers	10
Service Ready Engine	3		



LOOK UP
AND LIVE

VANCOUVER
FIRE RESCUE

Major Responses

Explosion near 353 Burrard Street

In February, a mechanical malfunction caused an explosion of an electrical vault outside of 353 Burrard Street sending rubble and debris flying several metres damaging the buildings around it. VFRS responded and was able to get the fire under control while managing the vault-area to eliminate the fire from spreading. The VFRS response totaled 12 apparatuses and over 30 VFRS members attended the fire.

3-Alarm Fire at Homeless Encampment on Richards Street

In June, VFRS responded to a large fire at a homeless encampment near 577 Richards Street. With propane cylinders inside the tents exploding, the fire grew rapidly. Fortunately, fire crews were able to get the flame extinguished quickly. The VFRS response totaled 17 apparatuses and over 50 VFRS team members.

3-Alarm Fire at 414 East 10th Avenue

In July, VFRS responded to a fire at an apartment building at 414 East 10th Avenue which had previously been issued 20 fire safety violations. The damage from the fire was so extensive that the building had to be written off and the tenants moved elsewhere. The VFRS response totaled 26 apparatuses and over 80 VFRS team members. In the months following the initial fire, VFRS crews responded to put out multiple fires caused by squatters.

3-Alarm Fire at 1014 Granville Street

In September, VFRS responded to a car fire in an alleyway behind 1014 Granville Street that spread to the backpacker hostel Samesun and Belmont Hotel. Evacuations of both buildings was done immediately with the damage from the fire leading to the closure of the hostel. The VFRS response totaled 24 apparatuses and over 110 VFRS team members.

3-Alarm Fire on the 2000 Block of West 41st Avenue

In October, VFRS responded to a fire on 2000 block of West 41st Avenue in Kerrisdale. The 3-alarm fire destroyed four businesses and damaged a fifth, in addition to displacing four residential units on the second floor of one of the buildings. The VFRS response totaled 21 apparatuses and over 70 VFRS team members.

Technical Rescue at 1033 Nelson Street

In November, VFRS responded to a call for a technical rescue at a collapsed construction site at 1033 Nelson Street. The result of the collapsing building caused 3 workers to be trapped in the rubble. VFRS' Technical Rescue team went into action, successfully getting all the workers to safety and the medical attention they needed.

BC Wildfire Response

During the summer of 2023 the wildfire situation faced by fire fighters and communities in the Okanagan triggered states of emergencies across the region. At the request of the province, the City of Vancouver and VFRS deployed two wildland units with appropriately trained staff to help exhausted crews in the region.



STALKED
PENTO

RACE
NIGHT

CRACK

VEER

WONG

L 2

Challenges We're Facing



While there are many highlights from 2023 to celebrate, there are also many challenges facing VFRS and our community at large.

Call Volumes - Calls volumes continue to rise and were up 10% in 2023. These calls include fires with damage up 19% (up to 12 fires per day), alarms up 13% (up to 40 alarms per day) and medical calls up 9%. Call volume increases are leading to high levels of fatigue and burnout amongst firefighters while stretching department resources thin. Staffing-levels and budget continue to come to the forefront to keep our community and fire teams safe.

Opioid Epidemic - Since 2016, British Columbia has been dealing with an opioid epidemic leading to a major increase in overdose-related calls. Vancouver firefighters responded to 8,937 overdose calls (28% of total medical calls) in 2023. Firefighters are trained to administer naloxone, an opioid overdose reversal medication, which was required 1,004 times during the year.

SRO Fires - The increase of fires in SRO buildings poses a significant threat, prompting the implementation of different strategies to mitigate safety hazards in these densely populated dwellings. Strategies include:

- Comprehensive fire safety training for SRO managers utilizing a "train the trainer" approach;
- Collaboration with other major metropolitan fire departments;
- Changes in billing policies for false alarms;
- Adjustments in alarm sensitivities and other by-law considerations to reduce false alarms;
- Collaborative efforts with BC Housing;
- Public education campaigns;
- An in-depth SRO study with Darkhorse Analytics to identify issues and solutions.

Additionally, prosecutions targeting non-compliant SRO operators are being pursued rigorously. To address the escalating fire incidents, urgent and targeted measures, including advocating for a ban on indoor use and sale of items contributing to fires, must be taken at various government levels to safeguard communities and ensure public safety.

Lockable Lighters - The use of lockable lighters has posed a new challenge in fire prevention efforts. Their design, featuring a continuous flame without the need for constant button pressure, renders them susceptible to misuse, particularly in situations of impairment such as drug use. Indoor smoking of illicit drugs using lockable lighters is prevalent, with users often inadvertently leaving flames unattended, leading to potential ignition of combustible materials. Moreover, the process of refilling these lighters carries its own dangers, as spilled lighter fluid can easily ignite, especially on clothing. The accessibility of lockable lighters online and in stores, coupled with lax regulatory oversight, further exacerbates the fire risk, underscoring the urgent need for greater awareness and regulation surrounding their use. Addressing the accessibility and safe usage of such items requires collaboration with stakeholders and innovative approaches to minimize fire risks while ensuring individual autonomy and safety.

Lithium-ion Batteries - Lithium-ion batteries present significant challenges to fire departments due to their unique properties and potential hazards. These batteries, commonly found in electronic devices, electric vehicles, and renewable energy systems, can ignite and burn at extremely high temperatures, releasing toxic gases and posing explosion risks when exposed to heat or damage. Firefighters must contend with the volatility of lithium-ion batteries, which can reignite even after initial extinguishment, complicating firefighting efforts and increasing the duration and intensity of the response. Moreover, the electrolyte inside lithium-ion batteries can release flammable gases when exposed to water, creating additional safety concerns for responders. Proper training, specialized equipment, and protocols for handling lithium-ion battery fires are essential for fire departments to effectively manage these incidents and ensure the safety of both responders and the public. Ongoing research and collaboration with industry experts are crucial for creating best practices and strategies to mitigate the risks associated with lithium-ion battery fires.



Join Us

Vancouver Fire Rescue Services employs over 920 people who respond to a wide variety of emergency and non-emergency incidents, including fires, motor vehicle accidents, and other medical situations. We are an equal opportunity employer that practices the highest standards of diversity and inclusion at our 20 fire halls, dedicated training centre, and two fire prevention offices.

We are looking for qualified dynamic people to join our team.

Firefighting is a challenging career that requires self-motivated and physically fit people who thrive in a team atmosphere, enjoy working with the public, and are determined to succeed in whatever they do. If these are some of your attributes and you are excited to serve your community, this is the career for you!



vancouver.ca/your-government/join-fire-and-rescue-services.aspx





*Photo credit: Ian Kobylanski

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