

# FIRE WATCH



## FIRE PREVENTION WEEK

# “SERVE UP FIRE SAFETY IN THE KITCHEN!”

The Valley Regional Fire Authority (VRFA) is teaming up with the National Fire Protection Association® (NFPA) to promote this year’s Fire Prevention Week campaign, “Serve Up Fire Safety in the Kitchen!”

According to NFPA, cooking is the leading cause of home fires and home fire injuries in the United States. Almost half (44%) of reported home fires start in the kitchen. Two-thirds (66%) of home cooking fires start with ignition of food or other cooking materials.

The VRFA shares the following safety tips to help you stay safe in the kitchen and prevent cooking fires:

### Watch What You’re Cooking

- » Never leave cooking food unattended. Stay in the kitchen when you fry, broil, or grill. If you have to leave, even for a short time, turn off the stove.
- » If you are simmering, baking, roasting, or boiling food, check it regularly, remain in the home while food is cooking.
- » Use a timer to remind you that you’re cooking.

### Be in a Condition to Cook

- » Don’t cook on the stove if you’ve been consuming alcohol.
- » Avoid using the stove if you are exceedingly sleepy.
- » Don’t cook under the influence of other drugs or mind-altering medications.



### Clear Your Cooking Surfaces

- » Keep flammable items such as wooden spoons, pot holders, towels, and paper towels clear of the stovetop.
- » Clean the oven regularly to remove any food debris and clean up spills immediately.
- » Clean stovetops regularly, removing oil, grease, and food debris.
- » Keep flammable items such as paper packaging or plastic bags clear of cooking appliances such as toasters, toaster ovens, deep fryers, or electric skillet.
- » Clean grease and oil from the outside of pots and pans before you put them on the stove or in the oven.

### Use Appliances Wisely

- » Read the manufacturer’s instructions and safety warnings for all appliances and follow them closely.
- » Register all new appliances immediately so you can receive recall information.
- » Act on product recalls immediately.
- » Review product safety complaints for the appliances you have in your kitchen to assess potential hazards.
- » Clean your range hood of grease buildup regularly.
- » Inspect the power cords on all appliances regularly and replace them if they are frayed.

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# FIRE PREVENTION WEEK CONTINUED

- » Store small appliances unplugged.
- » Completely cool small appliances before storing them.
- » Don't use extension cords. Plug appliances directly into outlets.
- » Keep all appliances clean and free of crumbs, grease, and other food debris.
- » Have appliances serviced regularly to keep them in good working condition.



- Maintain Personal Safety**
- » Don't wear loose-fitting clothing around cooking surfaces, especially loose sleeves.
  - » Roll up sleeves to keep them away from cooking surfaces.
  - » Tuck in shirts before cooking.
  - » Secure long hair to keep it away from cooking surfaces.
  - » Have a "kid and pet free zone" of at least three feet around the stove and areas where hot food or drink is prepared or carried.
  - » If you have children in the house, consider using the back burners of the stove.

- General Safety Tips**
- » Prevent spillovers of grease or oil by not overfilling pots and pans.
  - » Keep metal out of the microwave.
  - » Be careful when lighting a pilot light or flame.
  - » Don't leave candles or sterno pots burning unattended.

By taking the above precautions, you can prevent fires in your kitchen. A safer kitchen will help protect your home and family. For more information on kitchen safety and how to prevent fires in your home visit [www.vrfa.org/community/safety-information](http://www.vrfa.org/community/safety-information)

# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIVISION SPOTLIGHT

Firefighters and red fire engines might be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the Valley Regional Fire Authority (VRFA). While we take great pride in the service our firefighters provide our community, they don't do it alone. Many are working behind the scenes to keep the VRFA running smoothly and efficiently, including our Information Technology (IT) team. They play an essential role in daily operations.

IT Manager Jim Smith has been with the VRFA for nearly 13 years. Over those 13 years, we have added firefighters, fire stations, and additional administrative staff, which required more technology, new software, and infrastructure upgrades. This extra workload required the addition of two Systems Analysts, Ryan Simeon and Thomas Downs, and a Data Analyst, Noah Chang.

There is no typical day for this dedicated team. IT Manager Smith can often be found in the apparatus bay at shift change to troubleshoot technical issues from the off-going shift. He spends several hours every day fielding phone calls, answering emails, and assisting with walk-in queries. System Analysts Simeon and Downs support firefighters by addressing connectivity issues with tablets, repairing broken pagers, and helping with online forms. They assist the Fire Marshal's Office with mobile systems that allow fire inspectors to spend more time in the field. The IT team also supports administrative staff with software issues, online forms, and printer problems.

"The IT team has been instrumental in improving the functionality of the Fire Marshal's Office," said Deputy Fire Marshal Mike Homan, "We depend on technology to conduct fire inspections and investigations. The IT team always makes themselves available, often at a moment's notice, to fix any problems."

The VRFA is an around the clock operation, and the systems in place span the spectrum from specialized software and pagers to handheld tablets, and computers onboard fire apparatus. What sets this team apart from other technological careers is the variety of tasks and projects. It is rare for Systems Analysts to work on radios, pagers, security cameras, fuel pumps, and door locks.



SYSTEMS ANALYST THOMAS DOWNS, IT MANAGER JIM SMITH AND SYSTEMS ANALYST RYAN SIMEON

With oversight from IT Manager Smith, the team is continually working to improve our network infrastructure. Tasks include troubleshooting problems, planning for upgrades, increasing cybersecurity, and preparing for any technical challenges that may arise.

In March, COVID-19 put the team to the test. When Governor Inslee issued Stay at Home orders, the VRFA needed to remain at full capacity while looking out for staff health and safety. The administrative staff was permitted to work from home on a rotating basis to achieve social distancing. This meant the IT Division needed to quickly set-up nearly a dozen remote work stations. This required inventive thinking, the utilization of existing equipment, and implementing software for remote users.

Additionally, when the Clean Car for COVID-19 transport went into service at a separate facility, the team quickly sprang into action. In just a few days, the team programmed and installed network infrastructure for the temporary fire station. Thanks to innovative planning by the IT team, the makeshift station ran smoothly.

Data Analyst Noah Chang is the final piece to our IT team. In 2018, Noah was a recipient of the VRFA Professional Excellence Award. He was recognized for his work streamlining

data for the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and conducting a community risk analysis. Accurate data is essential for future planning of fire station locations, personnel, and public education programs. "As we review public education programs, we look to Noah to provide quick and accurate data to determine which programs need fine-tuning and what areas of the community we are missing," says Public Information & Education Officer Kelly Hawks.



NOAH CHANG  
DATA ANALYST

When asked what they enjoy the most about the VRFA, the entire team said, "The people." Ryan went on to say, "It is a friendly working environment with the common goal of serving the community." They all mentioned enjoying the broad scope of work and the opportunities to solve problems.

So next time you see one of our red engines rolling down the street, a fire inspector at a business or a public educator teaching a class, know that there is a team working quietly in the background, keeping them connected and technologically up-to-date.



# FIRE CHIEF’S MESSAGE



BRENT D. SWEARINGEN

Each year, the week that contains October 9th is proclaimed as Fire Prevention Week in the United States. During this time you will be reminded to test your smoke alarms, change their batteries, conduct exit drills in your home, and a host of other good advice on being fire safe and aware. Rather than repeat these worthwhile tips, I would like to again speak to the history of fire prevention codes and bureaus that monitor and enforce these codes.

In last autumn’s Fire Watch, I discussed the origins of Fire Prevention Week and how it was instituted in October of 1922 to commemorate the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 and raise awareness of fire prevention. The Chicago conflagration taught the bitter lessons of inadequate building and planning codes at the cost of 250 dead and 100,000 homeless. As a result, building spacing and materials were improved and even became a marketing strategy. Marketing materials for the newly-built Iroquois theater in Chicago advertised that the building was “Absolutely Fireproof” when

the theater opened on November 23, 1903. In a scant five weeks, a fire during a packed house in the Iroquois Theater left 602 people dead. While the building itself did not add to the fire load, hidden exits, exit doors that opened inward, and unfamiliar locks on the exit doors

## VRFA fire plan examiners work to ensure that buildings are constructed to the latest safety codes.

accounted for a majority of the deaths, as scenery and furnishing burned and filled the building with smoke. A set of ornamental doors that did not open lured over 200 people into a dead end hallway where they perished. This fire was the impetus to ensure that all exit doors are clearly marked, unlocked, and furnished with panic hardware.

Eight years later, 146 people died in a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in Manhattan because exit doors were chained shut to prevent unauthorized breaks. This fire was key to boosting the trade union movement among garment workers who were powerless to confront bosses who ignored safety measures and fire codes.

The final example is the 1942 Cocoanut Grove nightclub fire in Boston, in which 492 people perished in a building that had a maximum posted occupancy of 460. It is estimated that

the club was operating at over two times its allowed capacity. Decorations and finishes were not fire retardant or inspected as was required by the fire codes in place at the time. This fueled the incredible flame spread and choking smoke.

The tragedies above happened within minutes. Victims of the Cocoanut Grove fire were later found at their tables with drinks still in their hands.

VRFA fire plan examiners work to ensure that buildings are constructed to the latest safety codes. Inspectors go out into the field and ensure that the standards that are in place are being maintained to ensure that the residents and visitors to our towns are as safe from fire dangers as we can make them.

That these incidents happened over a century ago is a testament to the fact that codes and regulations work to prevent catastrophic accidents. More recent incidents, such as the 2016 Ghost Ship fire in Oakland California that killed 36 people, demonstrate the price of not applying what we have learned.

So please, be aware, be safe, and thank a fire inspector when you see them out in the community.

# CHAPLAINS PROVIDE SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE DURING STRESSFUL EVENTS

In our daily role of providing emergency services, we bear witness to extremely stressful situations and sometimes tragic outcomes. These events are difficult for both the families involved and our emergency responders. To help those who are experiencing this crisis-related trauma, local volunteer faith leaders have partnered with the VRFA and local police departments to create a chaplaincy program.

Much like firefighters and police officers, Chaplains are available to respond to emergency scenes day or night, to the streets, into homes or local businesses. There may also be a need to go beyond the support provided at the original scene, providing follow-up care, or conducting a memorial service. In 2019, chaplains responded to 24 calls to provide support and comfort to firefighters and community members.



After passing necessary background checks, Chaplains receive training regarding emergency response procedures and are introduced to staff at both fire and police agencies. Once properly prepared, they are added to the list of chaplains available for dispatching to emergency scenes when needed.

Chaplain Jay Coon, who has served many years for both fire and police, described the position in these words:

“Chaplaincy is about being called to serve humanity in the time of greatest need. To humbly comfort, care, and counsel those who are experiencing a variety of trauma during an unprepared crisis. Chaplains also serve alongside men and women in uniform, to provide encouragement, support, or sometimes just a listening ear. To serve in such a capacity is a deep honor and an incredible opportunity.”

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Michael Patterson, a Captain with the VRFA, is the department’s Chaplain Coordinator. In addition to his regular firefighting duties, Captain Patterson works alongside the Commander of the Auburn Police Department to help develop local faith leaders into new Chaplains. “Chaplains are there to provide support and guidance to all. It is comforting to know they have our backs and those of the citizens we serve,” said Patterson.

Currently, the Valley Regional Fire Authority and the local police departments have five local volunteer Chaplains. These selfless faith leaders work full-time jobs and give an average of 17 hours each month to aid their communities.



## THE VRFA GIVES BACK

The Valley Professional Firefighters, IAFF Local 1352, is involved in many community service projects, charities, and benevolent functions. One of the most valuable community service programs conducted by the Valley Professional Firefighters is the Adopt-a-Highway program. Under the guidance of the Washington State Department of Transportation, Adopt-a-Highway is a roadside clean-up program that promotes pride and local ownership. In 1999, Deputy Chief Dave Larberg, who was a firefighter at the time, proposed the idea of adopting a highway. State Route 18, near the Auburn Way South exit and the Auburn-Black Diamond Road exit, was the highway selected for the volunteer group. Local 1352 members enthusiastically approved the proposal.

Twenty-one years later, the program is still going strong with each of the four shifts committing to one day of clean-up per year. After working a 24-hour shift and before going home to their families, firefighters head out to the highway to pick up litter alongside the roadway. The clean-up is entirely volunteer-based, and no members are compensated while performing the clean-up. Over the years,



LOCAL 1352 FIREFIGHTERS ON CLEAN-UP DUTY IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE PROGRAM

tons of trash has been collected. Community service projects like this exemplify the selfless service of Local 1352 and its members.

Another important benevolent program that the Valley Professional Firefighters support is a hot dog stand during Auburn Days. The proceeds of the hot dog stand go to several benevolent causes such as Toys for Kids, the Humane Society, and Operation Warm Coat Drive. Unfortunately, this year Auburn Days was canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions. All programs sponsored by the Valley Professional Firefighters aim at improving the community and lives of community members.

## SCOUT NIGHT AT THE FIRE STATION POSTPONED

In response to the pandemic, we will be postponing our "Scout Night at the Fire Station" event, usually held in November. We hope to reschedule the event in the spring, pending our ability to meet COVID-19 guidelines.



The event welcomes all scouting and adventure groups from the Algona, Auburn and Pacific area to participate in learning stations designed around badge requirements. Topics for the event include a tour of the fire station, fire safety, basic first aid training, AED awareness, pet safety, cooking safety, knot tying, water safety, forensics and information on how to be prepared for a disaster.

Questions about the event can be directed to [public.info@vrfa.org](mailto:public.info@vrfa.org) or 253-288-5800.

**WWW.VRFA.ORG**



### VRFA Services

The VRFA provides CPR and First Aid classes, complimentary blood pressure checks, fire station tours, custom-fit bicycle helmets, custom-fit life jackets, smoke alarms, child car seat inspections and more.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

call **253-288-5800** or  
go to **[www.vrfa.org](http://www.vrfa.org)**

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#### **Dave Larberg**

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**The VRFA is committed to our mission:  
WE SERVE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY**