

FIRE WATCH

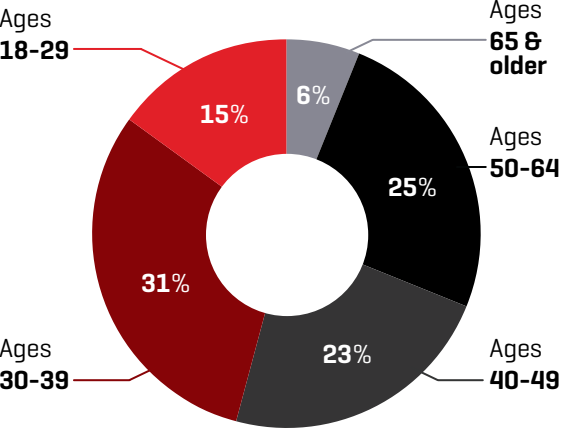


VRFA'S MOUD PROGRAM: ONE YEAR OF IMPACTFUL OUTREACH

During its inaugural year, the Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) team has made significant strides in connecting individuals to crucial support services. The program has successfully reached 150 unique patients, each of whom are grappling with substance use disorders. Beyond just addressing addiction, the MOUD team also provides resources for various concurrent challenges, including falls, healthcare needs, housing, mental health care, and caregiving services.

The program serves a diverse age range of clients, demonstrating its widespread relevance and underscoring the necessity of comprehensive support for individuals across different life stages.

The age breakdown of participants is as follows:



Collaborating for Change

A strong partnership with VRFA fire crews has been crucial to the MOUD program's success. When crews encounter individuals struggling with substance use or respond to overdose calls, they send referrals to the MOUD team, providing vital information that helps the team establish contact. The volume of these referrals increased throughout the year, affirming their commitment to long-term community change. Fire crews have provided encouraging feedback, including notes of gratitude and an understanding that long-term change takes time. With this understanding, crews have been willing to re-refer community members they see multiple times.

Success Stories

Various success stories vividly illustrate the MOUD team's commitment to helping individuals achieve lasting change. One notable case involved a young man facing homelessness alongside his pregnant girlfriend. With teamwork, the MOUD team successfully connected him to medical care for withdrawal management and helped him enter an inpatient treatment program. Following his treatment and through a partnership with the City of Auburn's Homeless Outreach team, he and his girlfriend now reside in sober housing. They are actively engaged in treatment, creating a foundation for a healthy future together.

The MOUD team received a referral for a young woman who had an overdose and struggled with substance use and mental illness for years. Recognizing that substance use is influenced by various life factors, the team coordinated her entry into a treatment program that addressed both her substance use and mental health. After completing treatment, they connected her to ongoing medical care and a housing recovery program. As part of her recovery, she focused on reconnecting with her family, working hard to regain trust and rebuild healthy relationships. Her efforts have enabled her to move back in with her family, providing her love, safety, and support.

Another inspiring story involved a woman who experienced multiple overdoses. Recognizing her fear of the impact her substance use had on her family, she sought help, leading to support from the MOUD team. With access to appropriate medication and a supportive network, she achieved sobriety and has since reconnected with her family, demonstrating the power of restoration and recovery.

Challenges Ahead

Despite the successes, the program has identified several challenges. A significant hurdle remains the ability to locate individuals who experience an overdose and are homeless. As the program

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FIRE PREVENTION WEEK 2025

CHARGE INTO FIRE SAFETY™ LITHIUM-ION BATTERIES IN YOUR HOME



We are teaming up again with the National Fire Protection Association™ (NFPA)—the official sponsor of Fire Prevention Week for over 100 years—to promote Fire Prevention Week™. This year's theme, "Charge into Fire Safety™. Lithium-Ion Batteries in Your Home," highlights the importance of buying, charging, and recycling lithium-ion batteries safely.

Why It's Important

Lithium-ion batteries are widely used in rechargeable devices and household electronics, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, power tools, lawn equipment, e-cigarettes, headphones, and children's toys.

Lithium-ion batteries pose serious hazards if not used correctly or damaged, including overheating, fire, and explosion. To reduce these risks, it's important to know which devices are powered by them. This year's Fire Prevention Week campaign promotes awareness of the importance of using lithium-ion batteries correctly to prevent fires in the home and to follow the "Buy, Charge, and Recycle Safely" approach.

Valley Regional Fire Authority offers you these key safety tips to protect yourself and your loved ones:

Buy only listed products.

- Before purchasing a product with a lithium-ion battery, take time to research it.
- Check for a certification mark from a nationally recognized testing laboratory, indicating the product meets key safety standards.
- Many products sold online and in stores may not meet safety standards and could increase fire risk.

Charge devices safely.

- Always use the charger provided with your device and follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.
- If you need a new charger, buy one from the manufacturer or one approved by the manufacturer.
- Charge devices on a hard, flat surface. Avoid placing them on beds, couches, or under pillows while charging.
- Unplug devices or remove batteries once fully charged to prevent overheating.

Recycle batteries responsibly.

- Never dispose of lithium-ion batteries in the trash or regular recycling bins.
- Use certified battery recycling locations. Visit www.call2recycle.org to find a drop-off site near you.

To learn more about Fire Prevention Week and this year's theme, "Charge into Fire Safety™. Lithium-Ion Batteries in Your Home," visit www.fpw.org. Additional Fire Prevention Week resources for children, caregivers, educators, and families can be found at www.sparky.org and www.sparkyschoolhouse.org.



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EMS SPOTLIGHT FALLS

Planning Before the Fall: Why Early Action Matters for Our Aging Community

Falls are a common reason for 911 calls, especially among older adults and those with ongoing health challenges. Firefighters and EMTs are ready to respond quickly and compassionately, but they also encourage thoughtful planning and proactive health management to prevent falls.

A Growing Concern

Our mobility and balance may decline as we age or face health issues. Unfortunately, many individuals and families wait for a serious fall or health crisis before taking action. By that time, the consequences can be severe, such as fractures, head injuries, or hospital stays. Additionally, if the underlying causes of health decline are not addressed, it may result in repeated requests for assistance.

The Cycle of Crisis Response

When we respond to a fall, the main priority is to provide immediate care, including checking for injuries and assessing vital signs. While this is crucial, it represents a reactive approach. Without appropriate follow-up care or preventive measures, many individuals may be in similar situations and at risk of falling again.

Common Warning Signs That Should Prompt Planning

If you or a loved one notices any of the following, it might be time to make a plan:

- Frequent trips, stumbles, or past falls—even if they weren’t serious

- Difficulty standing up from a chair or walking without help
- Chronic conditions like heart failure or respiratory issues that could affect mobility
- Feeling unusually tired or weak during daily activities



Why Early Planning Matters

Proactive planning doesn’t mean losing independence. In fact, it’s about protecting it! Simple actions like making your home safer, using assistive devices, reviewing medications with your doctor, or starting physical therapy can significantly reduce fall risk. It’s also important for families and caregivers to be involved in discussions about future care needs and emergency plans.

Many resources, such as VRFA CARES, home health evaluations, and aging support services, are available to help keep individuals safe and supported at home. Recognizing the need for fall prevention resources and seeking help is vital in staying safe.

A Message from Your EMS Community

We encourage everyone to take proactive steps before emergencies arise. Don’t wait for a fall or other health episode to start thinking about your needs. Planning can keep you safer and help preserve your dignity, independence, and quality of life. Let’s work together to promote safety and well-being for all!

FALL PREVENTION RESOURCES

SELF-SURVEY FOR FALL RISK

<https://www.ncoa.org/tools/falls-free-checkup/>

KING COUNTY FALL PREVENTION PROGRAM

Home assessment, equipment, and installation assistance:

<https://tinyurl.com/493nrdvz>

CITY OF AUBURN HOUSING REPAIR

Assistance with home repairs to reduce fall risk:

<https://tinyurl.com/3z8zspp9>

AUBURN SENIOR ACTIVITY CENTER

<https://tinyurl.com/28twyt7>

One Step Ahead Program | provides checklist of home hazards

Fall Prevention Workshops | free fall screening by experienced healthcare professional

Foot Care Clinic

Stay Active and Independent for Life (SAIL) fitness program

SAIL is a fitness program for adults age 50 and older. Exercise to improve strength, balance and fitness is the most important activity to stay active and reduce chances of falling. SAIL consists of warmup, light aerobics, strength and balance training and cooldown. All exercises can be done seated or standing.

EXPANDING OUR CARES TEAM TO MEET GROWING DEMAND



TAYLOR BERNARDI
CLINICAL CARE NAVIGATOR

Taylor Bernardi joined our team in the spring as a Clinical Care Navigator with the CARES Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) team. With over five years of experience in community behavioral health,

including roles as an Substance Use Disorder Professional Trainee and Outreach Case Manager at Catholic Community Services, Taylor is dedicated to helping others achieve wellness and stability, drawing from her own lived experiences. Deeply connected to the local community, having been born in Tacoma and raised in South King County, she genuinely cares for those she serves.



ARI LOGSDON
SOCIAL WORKER

Arianna Logsdon has a diverse background, from direct patient care to crisis response. Most recently, she served as a Designated Crisis Responder with the Kittitas County Crisis Response Team. Arianna is

passionate about fostering strong community connections and ensuring community members have support beyond crises and emergencies. She looks forward to getting to know everyone and becoming an integral part of the team.



NICOLLETTE MARKIN
SOCIAL WORKER

Nicollette Markin earned her Master of Social Work degree from the University of Washington. She has experience in crisis response, community care, and behavioral health. Nicollette

has served as a Designated Crisis Responder in Pierce County and, most recently, as a Co-Responder with law enforcement. She is dedicated to providing trauma-informed care and is passionate about supporting individuals during their most challenging times. Nicollette is excited to join the team and looks forward to collaborating to bring a positive impact to the community.



EMILY ROBINSON
INTERN

Emily is a second-year Master of Social Work student at UW Tacoma. She earned her undergraduate degree in Psychology and Sociology from the University of Washington, Seattle. Emily is passionate

about helping low-income individuals access behavioral health services, a commitment that deepened during her time at Kitsap Mental Health Services. She is thrilled to join the VRFA CARES team to make a meaningful impact on our community.



SCOUT NIGHT

at the
Fire Station

Wed., October 29

5:30 - 8:30 PM

VRFA Station 33
500 182nd Ave E
Auburn, WA 98092



First Aid



Knot Tying

Emergency Preparedness



Cooking Safety

Smoke Alarms

Fire Escape Planning

Register Now

253.288.5881
Public.Info@vrfa.org

FIRE CHIEF’S MESSAGE



BRAD THOMPSON

As we transition into fall, I am reminded how fortunate we are to serve a community that values and supports public safety. Your trust in the Valley Regional Fire Authority enables us to continually enhance our services and prepare for the challenges that lie ahead.

In this issue of Fire Watch, you'll read about several exciting developments. This fall, we highlight an important health and safety topic in our EMS Spotlight: Falls. Falls are one of the leading causes of injury in our community, and we're committed to sharing simple steps everyone can take to stay safe.

Your ongoing support empowers us to innovate, adapt, and respond with excellence.

We are preparing for Fire Prevention Week, which this year has the theme "Charge into Fire Safety." We will share practical tips to help keep your home and family safe from electrical fires, focusing on precautions for lithium-ion batteries. This reminder is especially important as we approach the cooler months when electrical usage typically increases.

Our Capital Facilities Update continues with station projects designed to enhance response times, modernize our resources, and ensure we're ready for whatever emergencies come our way. We're also pleased to present our new river rescue apparatus,

which expands our ability to respond quickly and effectively to water emergencies in our region.

Another highlight is our Wildland Urban Interface Home Assessment program. By helping residents identify ways to make their homes and properties more fire-resistant, we're working together to reduce risk and strengthen our collective preparedness.

None of these advancements would be possible without the strong partnership between the VRFA and the people we serve. Your ongoing support empowers us to innovate, adapt, and respond with excellence. On behalf of the entire VRFA team, thank you for being an essential part of our mission.

Take care and be safe.

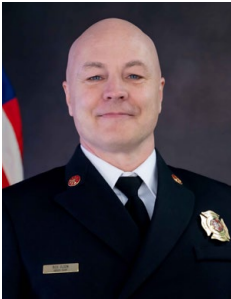
Brad Thompson
Fire Chief, Valley Regional Fire Authority

THE VRFA CELEBRATES THE RETIREMENT OF FOUR MEMBERS

Congratulations to Deputy Chief Rick Olson, Captain Reed Astley, Deputy Fire Marshal Matt Harrington, and Firefighter Kelly Scharf on their well-deserved retirements! Each has left a lasting mark on the Valley Regional Fire Authority and the communities we serve. Their leadership, dedication,

and commitment to excellence have been inspiring. While they begin this new chapter, their influence will continue to resonate within the VRFA for years.

For more information about their careers and legacy, please visit www.vrfa.org/news



RICK OLSON
DEPUTY CHIEF OF OPERATIONS
26 YEARS OF SERVICE



REED ASTLEY
CAPTAIN
21 YEARS OF SERVICE



MATT HARRINGTON
DEPUTY FIRE MARSHAL
25 YEARS OF SERVICE



KELLY SCHARF
FIREFIGHTER
27 YEARS OF SERVICE

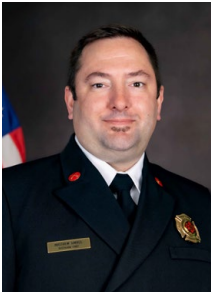
VRFA MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

In July, the VRFA celebrated several promotions and role transitions within the department.

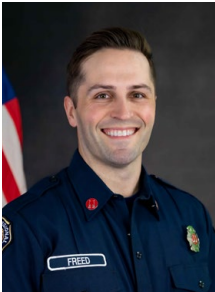
- Battalion Chief Steve Zehnder was promoted to Deputy Chief of Operations.
- Battalion Chief Matt Kinnee transitioned from shift to Battalion Chief of the Support Services Division.
- Captain Ryan Freed was promoted to Battalion Chief.
- Firefighter Erika Bartlett was promoted to Captain.
- Firefighter John Monsebroten was promoted to Captain.
- Firefighter Kevin Nold transitioned from shift firefighter to Deputy Fire Marshal.



STEVE ZEHNDER
DEPUTY CHIEF OF OPERATIONS



MATT KINNEE
BATTALION CHIEF



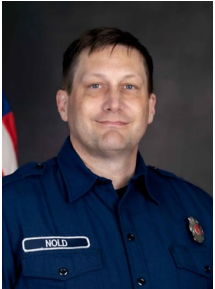
RYAN FREED
BATTALION CHIEF



ERIKA BARTLETT
CAPTAIN



JOHN MONSEBROTEN
CAPTAIN



KEVIN NOLD
DEPUTY FIRE MARSHAL

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VRFA'S MOUD PROGRAM CONT.

enters its second year, we are exploring strategies to improve real-time response capabilities, emphasizing the urgency of this issue.

Additionally, many individuals may not be ready to undergo treatment when first approached. The team is dedicated to fostering trust, providing education, and empowering individuals by offering choices in their recovery paths. Support from fire crews and community partners can further enhance these efforts.

Voices of the Team

MOUD team members Taylor and Lindsay share their deep commitment to this work. Taylor emphasizes the importance of personal connections, stating, "It's not just a pamphlet; it's about walking alongside individuals in their recovery journey." She notes how the program fosters hope and awareness that change is possible. Lindsay adds that her personal experience allows her to relate to patients, highlighting a patient-centered approach that respects individual goals. "As long as you're doing better today than yesterday, that's the point," she says, advocating for a broader understanding of the challenges that lead individuals to seek help.

Looking Forward

We cannot do this work alone; partnership is at the heart of what we do. We collaborate with many community partners in the VRFA's service area, including Healthpoint Clinics, WeCare Daily Clinics, and the City of Auburn's homeless outreach task force, to name a few. As the MOUD program moves into its second year, there is excitement about expanding partnerships with local providers and improving real-time patient engagement, especially for those in vulnerable situations.

These aspirations align with the overarching mission of creating a healthier community through compassion, connection, and collaboration. The team's commitment to fostering hope and positive change continues to impact lives, proving that recovery is a reachable goal with the proper support.

PROTECT YOUR HOME: FREE WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT PROGRAM OFFERED BY VRFA

This past summer, the VRFA launched a free Wildfire Home Assessment program to help homeowners identify and understand potential risks posed by wildfire and learn what steps they can take to reduce those risks. Homeowners who request this service receive a visit from trained VRFA staff members who carefully assess the exterior of the home and the three zones of concern: immediate (first 5' from the house),

intermediate zone (5'-30'), and the extended zone (30'-100'). Following the visit, homeowners receive a comprehensive report with recommendations for mitigating any areas of concern, plus information about alerts and evacuation for their area.

To schedule your free wildfire home assessment, go to www.vrfa.org/community/safety-information/wildfire-readiness/



THE VRFA GIVES BACK

Off-duty firefighters from VRFA participated in various events this summer to raise funds for charity.

This summer, VRFA and Local 1352 were once again invited to the Burn Foundations' chili cook-off, which took place in mid-July at Camp Eyabsut [meaning "To Rise Above Anything"]. The camp offers a positive summer experience for youth ages 5 to 17 with burn injuries, providing a supportive environment where they can laugh, grow, and encourage one another while forming lifelong friendships. Black Diamond Camp hosted the chili cook-off in Auburn with the Washington State Council of Firefighters Burn Foundation.

Firefighters Maxwell Sherrow and Jonathon Cookston represented the VRFA and Local 1352 at the event. Although the VRFA firefighters did not win, Firefighter Cookston was particularly proud of his recipe and is already looking forward to next year. He joked that they might have taken home the trophy if he had an ice cream machine like the winners! Firefighter Sherrow mentioned that his favorite part of the event was interacting with the children. "They were all so happy to be there, which made it a really enjoyable experience," said Sherrow.

Local 1352 was invited to participate in the inaugural Auburn Public School Foundation Charity Golf Tournament this summer. The organizers stated that the tournament aimed to bring together businesses and community members who love golf and share the common goal of supporting the children of the Auburn School District. Firefighters Jared Brooke and Kyle Strange represented VRFA and Local 1352 at the event, where they sponsored a hole on behalf of Local 1352. Both Firefighters, Brooke and Strange, appreciated the warm



hospitality during the event. The proceeds from the tournament will support programs that benefit youth throughout the district.

This summer, the Local 1352 Softball team participated in the 52nd annual Burn Foundation Softball Tournament, hosted by Olympia Fire. Although the team did not win, they impressed many with their grit, defensive skills, and speed. The team is looking forward to taking on the challenge again next year. In September, they also participated in another tournament benefiting Lionhardt, a foundation established by Local 1352's Blake Laidlaw. It aims to raise awareness and financial support for first responders facing critical illnesses or injuries.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: STATIONS 31, 36, 38 & VRFA HQ

As we work to continuously improve emergency services for our community, we are excited to share the latest updates on our Capital Facility projects. Here's a closer look at our progress at Stations 31, 36, 38, and the headquarters building.

Station 31

We have completed the preliminary work on the layout for Station 31. Our next step involves obtaining a cost estimate for the project. Once we receive this estimate, we will make any necessary adjustments and refine the layout and design to ensure it effectively meets our community's needs. Looking ahead, we anticipate breaking ground for construction in September or October 2026.



Station 36

Construction at Station 36 is in full swing! We are happy to report that the auger cast pilings are complete, and the contractor is moving forward with underground plumbing, electrical work, and footings. We expect this project to be finished next summer.



Station 38

We have successfully finished the work on both the interior layout and the exterior design for Station 38. Our team is focused on refining these designs over the next few months, with a plan to go to bid during the first quarter of 2026. We anticipate construction will begin in May 2026.

VRFA Headquarters

Early this year, we purchased the Cascade Orthopedic Building in downtown Auburn to house Administration, CARES, the Fire Marshal's Office, and Community Outreach staff. The building requires some improvements on the inside to adequately accommodate staff. We've completed preliminary work on the design and layout and are waiting for the cost estimate. We don't have a firm schedule yet, but our goal is to go to bid in early 2026.

INTRODUCING RIVER RESCUE 333

The VRFA launched River Rescue 333 this summer. This new truck is designed to respond quickly to water safety incidents throughout our service area. It can transport up to four water rescue technicians and all their gear, including two kayaks and an inflatable catamaran.



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**

VRFA Administration

Brad Thompson

Fire Chief/Administrator

Steve Zehnder

Deputy Chief of Operations

Tim Day

Deputy Chief of Community Risk Reduction

Mark Horaski

Chief Financial Officer

Sarah Borden

Human Resources Director

Board of Governance

Nancy Backus

Chair, City of Auburn Mayor

Troy Linnell

Vice-Chair, City of Algona Mayor

Members

Hanan Amer

Auburn City Council

Kerry Garberding

Pacific City Council

Vic Kave

City of Pacific Mayor

Lynda Osborn

Algona City Council

Eric Petersen

Pacific City Council

Tracy Taylor-Turner

Auburn City Council

Bill Thomas

Algona City Council

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VRFA HEADQUARTERS

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Business Hours 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
www.vrfa.org



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