

FIRE WATCH



VRFA CREWS ANSWER THE CALL DURING HISTORIC STORMS AND FLOODING

Last December, our communities faced devastating flooding as a relentless series of atmospheric rivers brought record rainfall to the Pacific Northwest. Beginning the second week of the month, rivers like the Green and White surged past flood stage, breaching levees and inundating neighborhoods. In Auburn, rising waters along the Green River forced urgent evacuations as flood risks escalated quickly.

The crisis intensified on December 16 when the White River breached its barriers, leading to the overnight evacuation of more than 300 homes. At 1:19 a.m., Captain Guy Smith received word from Battalion Chief Gary Barker that the levee along the White River in Pacific had been breached. As Captain Smith and his crew, Firefighters Tiffany Carlson and Robert Montaño, prepared to respond, the first 911 call was received. A resident at 506 4th Ave SE reported that floodwaters were pouring into his apartment and that he urgently needed help evacuating.

As the crew crossed the railroad tracks on 3rd Ave, they noticed water already covering the road. Recognizing the seriousness of the situation, Captain Smith called for swiftwater rescue teams, River Rescue 333 and 433. Firefighter Montaño parked the engine a block away from the scene as more 911 calls began streaming in. Proceeding on foot, the crew, led by Captain Smith, waded through rising currents to reach residents in immediate danger. At the time, it was unclear where the breach had occurred, but the firefighters pressed on, knocking on doors and guiding people to safety through water that was, in places, waist-deep.

As conditions worsened, Firefighter Montaño moved the engine to higher ground, preventing the loss of a vital piece of VRFA equipment. Firefighter Carlson accompanied Captain Smith through fast-moving, at or above waist-deep water to evacuate the residents on the north side of the apartment complex at the end of 4th Ave SE. Captain Smith and Firefighter

Carlson alerted as many residents as possible and escorted multiple occupants to safety. Meanwhile, Firefighter Montaño knocked on every door of the single-family residences along 4th Ave SE escorting adults and children, sometimes carrying them several blocks to safety.

Upon the arrival of River Rescue 333 and 433, Captain Smith directed the crews to park on 4th Ave SE and deploy rafts for imminent rescues of trapped occupants in the apartments at the end of 4th Ave SE. Fortunately, USAR Task Force 4 from California was already stationed nearby to assist with flooding. Within an hour, they joined forces with VRFA boats, local law enforcement, and the Coast Guard. Thanks to this swift, coordinated response, hundreds of homes were evacuated and dozens of people were rescued that night.

For their heroic efforts, Captain Smith, his crew, and many other VRFA members were recognized at an awards ceremony in mid-March, where the following awards were presented:

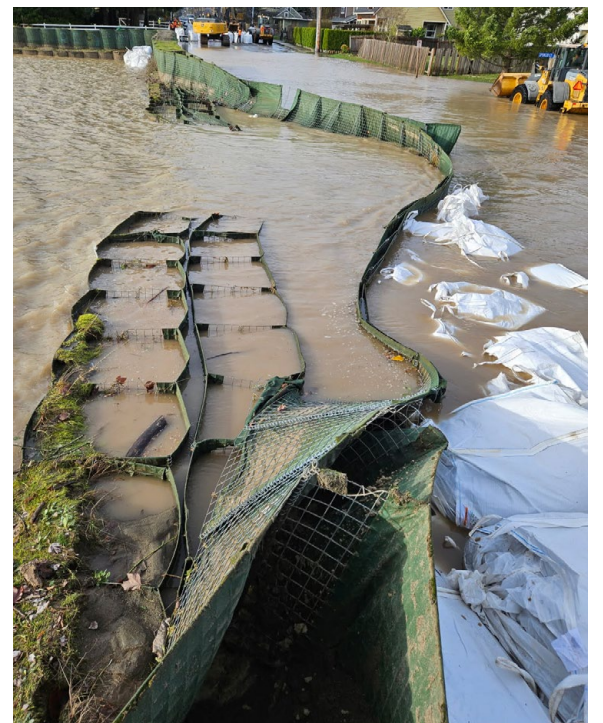
MEDAL OF VALOR

Captain Guy Smith, Engine 338

Firefighter Tiffany Carlson, Engine 338

Captain Smith and Firefighter Carlson worked tirelessly in waist-high moving water to rescue and evacuate dozens of individuals and families, including a small child who needed to be removed from a window.

[Article continues on the backpage...](#)



EMS SPOTLIGHT

COLD OR FLU — WHEN IS IT TIME TO CALL 911?

Every year, especially during cold and flu season, our crews respond to many calls from residents who aren't feeling well and are not sure what to do next. The cold and flu are common in the winter, and while most cases can be managed safely at home, there are times when people need additional help to get better. Knowing when to call 911 helps keep you safe and ensures emergency resources are available to those who need them most.

Managing Cold and Flu Symptoms at Home

Typical cold and flu symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, fatigue, congestion, and sometimes nausea or mild vomiting. For otherwise healthy individuals, these symptoms are uncomfortable but usually not emergencies. Rest, fluids, and over-the-counter medications used as directed are often enough to allow safe recovery

at home. Giving your body time to rest and recover is one of the most important steps in the healing process. In certain cases, especially in those with other health conditions, symptoms can become debilitating and require additional help. Calling 911 is always an option if you feel you are unable to manage the symptoms on your own and you have no other resources available.

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EMS SPOTLIGHT

COLD OR FLU — WHEN IS IT TIME TO CALL 911?

Article continued from cover story.

The Importance of Hydration

Hydration is one of the most critical factors when you're sick. Fever, sweating, vomiting, and decreased appetite can quickly lead to dehydration, especially in children and older adults. Signs of dehydration may include dark urine, urinating less than normal, dizziness when standing, dry mouth and lips, weakness, or confusion. Drinking water regularly is essential, even when you don't feel thirsty. It is also important to avoid certain drinks when you are sick, as drinks high in sugar and caffeine will dehydrate you. It is also important to avoid alcohol while sick. If someone is unable to keep fluids down for many hours or begins showing signs of significant dehydration, it may be time to seek medical care.



Have a Plan Before You Get Sick

Another important consideration is having a plan before you get sick. If you live alone, are elderly, or have chronic medical conditions, it is especially important to have someone who can check on you. Consider whether you have someone who can bring you fluids or medication or drive you to urgent care if your condition worsens. Many 911 calls for flu-related illness occur because individuals become too weak or dizzy to safely get help on their own. Having a support system in place can prevent a manageable illness from becoming an emergency.

When to Call 911

Certain symptoms should never be ignored. Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, bluish lips or face, new confusion,

inability to stay awake, seizures, severe weakness preventing movement, signs of stroke such as facial droop or slurred speech, severe dehydration, and altered mental status are all reasons to call 911 immediately. Infants, elderly individuals, pregnant patients, and those with significant underlying medical conditions can deteriorate more quickly, and early intervention is vital. It would be impossible to list every possible symptom or situation that requires 911 intervention, but these are the common ones. Any time you feel unable to handle the situation, 911 can be used for assistance. Once you think 911 is necessary, do not hesitate to call.

A Final Word from Your EMS Providers

Our Firefighter/EMT crews are always ready to respond, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Knowing how to manage and treat symptoms at home, when to seek urgent care, and when to call 911 helps everyone stay safe, and your safety is our priority. Preparation, hydration, and having a support plan in place can make all the difference during cold and flu season. Since it cannot be said too many times, we say again, if you believe a condition is life-threatening, do not hesitate to call. We are here to help.

COLD, FLU AND ILLNESS RESOURCES

FREE/LOW-COST MEDICAL CARE



Auburn Public Health

Christ Community Free Clinic
christfreeclinic.org

HealthPoint Auburn



[They request insurance but won't turn anyone away. They can help people enroll in healthcare, if needed.]

Annual Seattle/King County Clinic
April 23-26, 2026 at the Seattle Center

- General info about the clinic
seattlecenter.org/skcclinic
- Info for those wanting to seek services
seattlecenter.org/skcclinic/patients

NURSE LINES

Varies by health insurance, check the back of your insurance card.

Valley Comm 911 dispatch center has a Nurse Navigation Line where people can call for non-emergent medical reasons to seek advice, and if needed they can schedule an appointment at an urgent care and provide transportation to get people to appointments.

FOOD DELIVERY

Auburn Food Bank • Safeway • Fred Meyer

MEDICATION (MAIL) DELIVERY

CVS | Walgreens | Walmart
Dependent upon insurance. Call to verify.

PROTECTING YOUR HOME FROM WILDFIRE

Inside the **FREE VRFA Wildfire Home Assessment Program**



Wildfires are becoming more frequent and severe across Washington — impacting even areas once considered low risk. The VRFA is helping homeowners take action with a free Wildfire Home Assessment program.

What Is the VRFA Wildfire Home Assessment?

Available to homeowners in Algona, Auburn, and Pacific, this no-cost service provides:

- A thorough property evaluation
- Identification of wildfire risks and ignition hazards
- A customized action plan tailored to your home



What to Expect

Each assessment takes about one hour. Trained VRFA staff will evaluate your property in three key zones:

Immediate Zone
[0–5 feet]

Roof, eaves, exterior walls, windows, doors, decks

Intermediate Zone
[5–30 feet]

Vegetation and outbuildings

Extended Zone
[30–100 feet]

Trees and surrounding vegetation

After the visit, you'll receive a detailed mitigation report with practical, prioritized recommendations such as:

- Screening vents
- Improving landscaping
- Creating defensible space
- Reducing ignition risks around structures

VRFA staff are also available for follow-up questions and continued support.

How to Get Started

1. Complete the Wildfire Assessment Request Form at www.vrfa.org
2. VRFA will contact you to schedule your visit
3. A trained staff member conducts your assessment
4. Receive your personalized wildfire mitigation report

Empowering Residents. Strengthening Communities.
Schedule your free Wildfire Home Assessment today.

FIRE CHIEF'S MESSAGE



BRAD THOMPSON

As we head into spring, I want to pause and thank the residents of Auburn, Algona, and Pacific for your continued trust and support of the Valley Regional Fire Authority. This season is one of renewal, and it's also a time when the work we do together to prepare, prevent, and respond truly comes into focus.

A key part of that work is our updated Strategic Plan, which serves as the roadmap for the future of public safety in our communities.* It helps ensure that decisions about staffing, facilities, training, and programs are intentional, data-informed, and aligned with the risks we face today and tomorrow. Most importantly, the plan reflects community values and provides transparency and accountability as we invest public resources to deliver the highest level of service possible.

This summer, we look forward to opening Station 36, a milestone that reflects years of planning and community investment. When fully operational, Station 36 will strengthen response times, enhance firefighter safety, and improve service delivery for the growing areas it will serve. It's another example of how we are building today for the needs of tomorrow.

collaboration is not just a value; it is one of our greatest strengths

I'd also like to take a moment to reflect on the significant flooding that impacted our communities this winter. Many residents are still working through recovery, and we continue to evaluate our preparedness and response. Firefighters, alongside Urban Search and Rescue teams, state, and local response teams, saved many lives during this event. Emergency management professionals across jurisdictions worked side by side from the onset

through stabilization. In moments like these, we are reminded that collaboration is not just a value; it is one of our greatest strengths. Please take a moment to read about some of our staff who were recently recognized for their rescue efforts.

Finally, as warmer and drier weather approaches, I encourage you to take advantage of our Wildfire Home Assessment program. These free, voluntary visits help homeowners understand practical steps to reduce wildfire risk and increase resilience. Prevention is a shared responsibility, and small actions taken now can make a meaningful difference later.

Thank you for being our partners in public safety. On behalf of the entire VRFA team, stay prepared, take care, and be safe.

Brad Thompson
Fire Chief, Valley Regional Fire Authority

*View the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan at



VRFA MEMBERS ON THE MOVE



RYAN CONNELL
PROMOTED TO BATTALION CHIEF



DREW LARSON
PROMOTED TO CAPTAIN



SCOTT MCFERON
PROMOTED TO CAPTAIN



CARRIE TALAMAIVAO
PROMOTED TO CARES PROGRAM MANAGER



STEPHANIE LOPES
PROMOTED TO LEAD SOCIAL WORKER



NICOLE LYON
PROMOTED TO ACCOUNTING SUPERVISOR

RETIREMENTS



KEVIN MOREHART
BATTALION CHIEF

Battalion Chief Kevin Morehart retired after 31 years of dedicated service. Starting in 1994 with the Auburn Fire Department, Morehart quickly found his calling in the fire service, drawn by the camaraderie and hands-on work. Over his career, he served as a Fire Investigator, trained new firefighters,

coordinated apprenticeship programs, and played a key administrative role. Promoted to Captain in 2007 and Battalion Chief in 2019, Morehart earned recognition as Firefighter of the Year and received a Medal of Commendation for his contributions to training.

Known for his mentorship, commitment to health, and positive spirit, Morehart made a lasting impact on his colleagues and the community. We wish BC Morehart all the best and congratulate him on his well-earned retirement!



JOEL STRANGE
CAPTAIN

Captain Joel Strange retired with 28 years of dedicated service to the Algona, Auburn, and Pacific communities. His firefighting journey began in 1994 with the City of Richland, Washington. In January 1998, Strange joined the City of Auburn Fire Department. Strange contributed to key

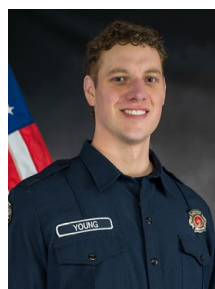
initiatives, including rebuilding the Pre-Incident Planning Team and serving on the wildland and training teams. He earned honors like the Medal of Commendation and a Unit Citation, but values most the camaraderie and teamwork of his colleagues. Among his proudest moments was working alongside his son, VRFA firefighter Kyle Strange. As he retires, Strange looks forward to new adventures with his family and pursuing his business interests.

VRFA WELCOMES SIX NEW TEAM MEMBERS!



NATHAN MCCLURG | FIREFIGHTER

Nathan McClurg is a former Marine and helicopter crew chief from Kent, WA. After nine years of service, he became a boat captain harvesting seafood. Now living in Port Orchard, he enjoys restoring a vintage motorhome and outdoor adventures with his family.



GAGE YOUNG | FIREFIGHTER

Gage Young began in medicine before moving into construction management, leading teams and volunteering in Kenya. A passionate athlete, he recently lost 50 pounds to pursue his fire service career and values teamwork and making an impact.



GRANT WHITCUTT | FIREFIGHTER

Grant Whitcutt, a former Division I decathlete, holds a Communications degree from Washington State University, has traveled internationally and fished in the Bering Sea. He enjoys outdoor challenges and dreams of visiting the Himalayas.



HENRY RUF | FIREFIGHTER

Henry Ruf is from West Seattle, has a background in finance, real estate, and medical device sales. A Washington State University graduate, he now lives in Bellevue, enjoys golf, the outdoors, and cheering on the Mariners.



TAYLOR JOHNSON | FIREFIGHTER

Taylor Johnson, a Portland native and Santa Clara economics graduate, spent ten years in construction and volunteered as a firefighter. Now living in Seattle, he enjoys golf, skiing, and training his dogs.



KAYLYN FOSTER | ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT

Kaylyn Foster has 12 years of government accounting experience. She enjoys traveling, tennis, and spending time with her family and dog.

THE VRFA GIVES BACK



The VRFA and Local 1352 Professional Firefighters proudly concluded 2025 with the 39th Annual Toys for Kids event.

This cherished tradition brings together the Auburn Food Bank, Local 1352 Firefighters, VRFA, local businesses, and our generous community members. Since its inception in 1986, this program has been honored to support families in need during the holiday season. Local 1352 firefighters dedicated countless hours to fundraising and raising awareness; you may have seen them at Fred Meyer throughout November and December.

Thanks to this incredible collaboration, nearly 300 families and 700 children from Auburn, Algona, and Pacific received gifts this year. What

makes this event truly special is its local impact – locally identified needs, locally raised funds, and locally distributed gifts, all made possible by local firefighters and volunteers.

We extend our gratitude to Local 1352 members, the City of Auburn, Auburn Food Bank, Fred Meyer, Dave & Buster’s, Bright Horizons, Jersey Mike’s, Hops N Drops, the Board of Governance, and the citizens of Auburn, Algona, and Pacific for their unwavering support.

If you or someone you know needs assistance during the 2026 holiday season, and they reside within the Auburn School District boundaries, please contact the Auburn Food Bank for more information. We look forward to continuing this tradition next year.

Article continued from cover story.

HISTORIC STORMS AND FLOODING CONT.

VALOROUS UNIT CITATIONS

Engine 338: Captain Guy Smith, Firefighter Tiffany Carlson, and Firefighter Robert Montaño.

Engine 338 was the first arriving unit in a fast-moving, chaotic, and dangerous incident. In addition to their personal efforts, they worked as a highly aggressive, organized, and effective team.

Engine 333: Captain Troy Kilcup, Firefighter Jim Franklin, and Firefighter Tim Roberts

River Rescue 333: Captain Dan Sequist, Firefighter Chase Lawrence, and Firefighter Johan Friis

River Rescue 433: Captain David Repnik, Firefighter Vincent Brown, and Firefighter David DeVries

Engine 333, River Rescue 333, and River Rescue 433 worked in extremely adverse conditions for an extended period to relocate dozens of individuals and families by boat and raft.

MEDAL OF MERIT

Battalion Chief Gary Barker, Battalion 331. BC Barker displayed exemplary leadership and tactical decision-making as the Incident Commander of the VRFA’s response to the Pacific flooding.

Battalion Chief Paul Strong. BC Strong staffed the King County Emergency Coordination Center from December 10 to December 22 during the flood

incident, and was instrumental in procuring state and federal response resources for our communities.

Battalion Chief Jason Herman. BC Herman served as the Branch Supervisor, coordinating the actions of two FEMA USAR task forces from California, a Marine Unit for the King County Sheriff’s Office, a National Guard detachment, US Coast Guard resources, and King County Search & Rescue assets.

Firefighter Robert Montaño, Engine 338. Firefighter Montaño was the driver of the first VRFA unit on scene in Pacific and personally notified and evacuated multiple residents, including children, whom he carried several blocks to higher ground.

MEDAL OF COMMENDATION

Captain Scott McFeron, Engine 336. Captain McFeron served as the Staging Area Manager for the Pacific Flood Event, an assignment that required significant multitasking and strong communication skills.

MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATION

Battalion Chief Jim Allenbaugh. BC Allenbaugh worked as part of an Incident Management Team, assisting BC Barker in a highly collaborative and effective way.

To learn more about these and other 2025 awards, visit www.vrfa.org.

CAPITAL FACILITIES UPDATE - STATION 36

Exciting progress continues at Station 36 in North Auburn! On the exterior, crews are installing brick and metal siding, while the roofing is nearing completion, pending a final touch as the weather permits. Inside, work is advancing steadily, with teams completing electrical and plumbing systems and now moving on to insulation and drywall installation.

To learn more about all VRFA Capital Facilities projects, visit vrfa.org/community/capital-facilities-updates



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

Tim Fairley

Algona City Council

Kerry Garberding

Pacific City Council

Vic Kave

City of Pacific Mayor

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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www.vrfa.org



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