

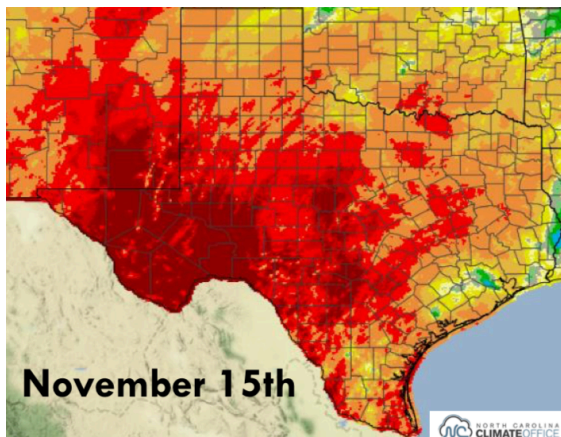
West Lake Limestone VFD And Emergency Services District #2

e-NEWSLETTER – 4th QTR. DECEMBER 2020

FIREFIGHTING ALONE WILL NOT STOP WILDFIRES

We've seen a summer of mega-fires in California and Colorado. Did you know that many of the ESD's in Texas sent firefighting crews and equipment west to assist in fighting these disasters? In Limestone County and the surrounding areas, we are preventing wildfires by fighting initial outbreaks like brush or grass fires before they grow into major wildfires. According to the Texas Forest Service, during our regular summer droughts, our risk exposures are quite high. Each year we are called out for numerous grass fires and brush fires, that if not quickly contained could rapidly spread, becoming disastrous wildfire emergencies.

According to a recent Texas Fire Potential Update from the Texas Forest Service, elevated and critical fire weather is likely across East and Central Texas this winter as timber litter fuels dry and become more receptive to burning due warm, dry air masses that have been in place. Fall leaf drop is occurring, increasing the fuel loading of timber litter fuels.



Persistent drought is expanding and intensifying east and north across the state where rainfall deficits of 25% or more have been observed over the past 60-days. Drought will continue to expand and deepen as we remain behind in rainfall and we'll see active conditions across East Texas where relative humidity values have ranged from 12 to 24% and winds speeds of 10 to 15 mph have been the norm.

Most fires begin in grass, brush, and timber litter fuel which is readily available. Energy Release Component (ERC) values are trending above normal, meaning that there is just lots of fuel available. High drying will continue to increase these ERC values across the state. So, with our warmer, dryer winters we expand our concerns and preparations as wildfire potential becomes a two-season affair!

What are we doing in ESD#2 to address these perennial issues? We must be prepared by having the proper equipment, well trained personnel, and most importantly, ready access to firefighting water.

Presently we house a fire engine and a brush truck at each of our fire stations. During the year, our firefighters refine their techniques used in attacking grass and brush fires, as well as other emergencies that could initiate wildfires. Our brush trucks are equipped with bumper sprayers and hand lines so that we can employ a procedure called "pump 'n roll" in which the driver maneuvers the brush truck along the fire line directing water on the flames. From the cage behind the cab of the truck, a firefighter uses a hand line to direct water toward the flames. On some occasions, especially if a fire line moves into dense ground cover or high fuel valued brush, a dismantled firefighter may have to extend a firehose and attack the flames. During these evolutions, our current protocol requires that an engine is on the scene to serve as a "nurse tender" providing water when brush trucks expend the 500-gallons they typically carry.

Our three stations are located so that at least one is within five road miles of most areas in our district. And at each station we have a water plant with 16,000-gallons of water stored for any emergency.

NEXT MAJOR IMPROVEMENT FOR WLLVFD

For several years, we have been planning on acquiring a much-needed tender, a fire service "water hauler." Adequate firefighting water is essential at the scene of a fire emergency. Because we are a rural district that does not have any fire hydrants, we must develop a system to

store and deliver thousands of gallons of water. An effective water supply system enhances community protection and helps prevent large loss fires. We have been working on ours for three years!

We have submitted two proposals to the FEMA Assistance to Firefighters program and several others to private foundations. Our FY-2019 AFG grant proposal (requesting \$400,000 for a tender) remained under consideration for the full funding period as proposals for \$1.2-billion in requests competed for \$350-million. Unfortunately, our score was just not high enough. But we'll try again next year! It is just very difficult for a small, rural fire department to have the run count and number of major fire emergencies in a year to compete with "the big boys." Presently, we have one proposal pending (for a \$160,000 matching grant) which could help us purchase a preowned tender. And finally, the ESD has been building an equipment replacement fund so, in time, we can purchase a tender even if we can't get outside financial help. Our goal is to add a 3,000-gallon pumper-tender to our fleet sometime in 2021!

2020 FUNDING ISSUES

As we all know that this year has been dominated by COVID restrictions and they have severely influenced the fire department's fund raising activities. Consequently, the WLLVFD's 2020-21 budget for is only \$42,000 rather than \$65,000 the previous year. It will be a lean year!

This puts considerable strain on critical needs like truck replacement, considering that our oldest is a 1980 fire engine that is well beyond its normal service life. We would also like to replace our 1997 brush trucks with 2.5-ton military conversions which are more robust and carry more water. Maintenance cost and reliability are always concerns related to older apparatus.

Another need that seems to get pushed to the back burner when funds are tight is sustainability. We have built a fire department that is professional in its operations and well respected in the county. To keep it that way and secure a similar future is a major challenge.

FROM THE FIRE CHIEF: "IT TAKES A VILLAGE!"

I'm not sure who first said that, but it was a wise person who understood the building of a volunteer Emergency Services Organization (ESO). All of us are involved in the success of our "Neighbors Helping Neighbors" approach to the business at hand.

Our volunteers respond to house fires, grass fires, medical emergencies, vehicle crashes, and other needs.

We create landing zones for helicopters and stand by at brush pile burns. Our Emergency Services Organization (ESO) is a service-oriented group of volunteers that give their time to meaningful purpose. We help! Some volunteer to fight fires. Some respond to medical calls. Members that train to use the Jaws-of-Life so they can extricate victims from car crashes while others just climb ladders to rescue cats. Other important work is also done by our volunteers who support our efforts in the field: planning, budgeting, purchasing, bookkeeping, reporting, fundraising, housekeeping, ... all the doings that make our ESO work.

We are always looking for other kinds of volunteers. The people that live here can contribute to our success. By watching out for your neighbors, contributing to the financial needs of the ESO, or just being fire-safe you reduce the burden. This can help us all feel we that are collective contributors to the well-being of our village.

My hope for the Holiday Season is that we continue to develop an unselfish concern for the welfare of others. Webster calls that altruism and that is the driving force behind the mission of our ESO.

FIREFIGHTER OF THE QUARTER

James Coleman and his wife Amanda, who is also a member of the department, along with their two children live in our district.



James started serving his community while growing up as a junior firefighter in a central Texas volunteer fire department, progressing to firefighter/first responder, and eventually holding an officer's position. As James moved to new locations he sought local fire departments, contributing to their successes before settling here and joining WLLVFD. James says, "I have felt drawn to helping

and giving back to my community since I was a little kid. I have helped in communities I've lived in many ways. Fortunately, fire departments have given me the means and opportunity to do this."

Chief McWhirter added, "James takes serving his community seriously. He is very involved in workdays, in training and in responding to emergencies. He brings a wealth of knowledge from his previous fire service experiences and we're happy to have him as a member."

Congratulations James as Firefighter of the Quarter.

FIRE-SAFE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Fire statistics show that, as we head for winter, the number of fires in homes increases.

Here's a list of things that will help you stay Fire-Safe:

- Check the operation of your smoke detectors. They will wake you up if a fire occurs while you're sleeping. The fire won't.
- Have an Escape Plan; know two ways out; close doors behind you; have a family meeting place outside, maybe the mailbox. Make sure everyone is out; don't go back inside. Call 911.
- Have an address sign posted at the driveway. The responders help sooner if they can find you.
- Ventilate while using a heater allowing fresh air inside. Any open flame used for heat generates carbon monoxide. CO accumulates and can kill you. Install a carbon monoxide detector!
- Don't put your space heater or candles near things that catch on fire like furniture, curtains, clothes, towels, tablecloths, Christmas trees, presents, or your bedding. Keep them four feet or further away if you can.
- Have your chimney cleaned. Soot in the chimney can catch fire and burn your house down.
- Make sure the live tree has water and check the lights and cords for frays and cracks.
- If a fire occurs in the oven, leave the door closed and turn the oven off. Escape and call 911.
- If a small stove top fire occurs, put a lid on it or throw handfuls of salt, not flour. Don't use water on a grease fire. Escape and call 911.

Put some thought into being Fire-Safe and enjoy the Holiday Season.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS EVERYONE

Even though Santa can't come to the fire station to greet the kids during our traditional pancake breakfast, we wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season.

Breakfast with Santa may be canceled, but we are going forward with our other tradition, sponsoring one or two families who are in need. We'll gather all the fixin's for a grand Christmas dinner, purchase presents for the children, prepare greeting cards, and deliver them to their homes so they too can have a memorable holiday.

Remember to be "Fire-Safe" as you check out the lights for your trees and place holiday candles throughout the house. When you gather with family, please be aware of measures that lessen the chances of contracting COVID. We at your ESD and VFD are always concerned for the health and safety of our community! We all are anxious to roll in the 2021 new year. And won't we all be relieved to put 2020 in the rear-view mirror!



Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays everyone!!

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