

Firehouse.com Article for November 2002

So, you want to become a firefighter? – Part 2: How do I find out which Fire Departments are accepting applications?

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This is the second installment of a series of articles intended to prepare the aspiring firefighter to be the best they can be.

Getting hired as a firefighter is not a simple process. It is not as easy as going down to your local fire station, filling out an application, and getting told to report to duty the next day. While that may have occurred in some departments many years ago, it doesn't quite work that way today. It actually can take a great deal of research to find out which fire departments are accepting applications, and what their testing process entails. Becoming a firefighter is not easy, but if you spend some quality time researching the position and the entire testing process, your chances should increase greatly at obtaining that badge you have been coveting.

When I started taking firefighter tests, I figured all I had to do was keep my eyes on the Sunday newspaper and subscribe to one of the services that send you postcards when departments are testing. That was a good start; however, I soon learned there was more to it than that. While there are many people that just do those two things (which are actually good things to be doing, don't get me wrong), I think you can greatly increase your chances by searching or investigating as many (if not all) of the following things as you can:

1. **Newspapers:** Over the last ten years, I bet I have seen less than 100 fire departments actually listing their job openings in the local newspapers. Because of that reason, don't spend all of your time just waiting for a position to appear in the paper. If a fire department is going to advertise, it will usually be in the Sunday paper of a major city. If you go to the local public library on Monday morning, you can usually find many of the major nationwide newspapers there to view, free of charge. Another place to check for major city newspapers is large newsstands and major bookstore chains, which carry a large variety of newspapers and magazines.
2. **Internet subscription services:** There are numerous subscription services available on the internet that will provide nationwide testing information for under \$100.00 per year. Not a bad investment when you think of it. I suggest not relying on just one service, but to subscribe to multiple services. I used to subscribe to two different services and found out the true value to having not one service, but two. Some services find out testing information before the others do, and vice-versa. Originally I had only subscribed to just one service. After talking with friends that subscribed to different services, I discovered that each service had their own benefits to offer, and that they complemented each other.
3. **Firehouse.com website Jobs section:** In addition to the above internet subscription services, here is another valuable service that promises to advertise positions nationwide

while also giving valuable information in the way of articles from various fire service professionals around the country.

4. **Networking:** By having a network of friends that are all taking firefighter tests, you will hopefully hear of a testing opportunity and then pass it on to the others. If you know of a testing opportunity, share it with your friends. You will then hope they do the same for you at some point. Remember, you're competing against the other candidates in some capacity, but you only truly compete against yourself. You are the one that has to perform throughout all phases of the hiring process.

When I was testing, there was a group of about four of us that were doing as much as we could to better prepare ourselves for becoming firefighters. We would share information, trade off commuting to tests, commuting to visit fire stations, commuting to classes, etc. Besides gaining quality friends that will hopefully last a life time, we were all benefiting by learning something from each of us, based on our successes and failures.

5. **Taking fire courses at the local community college or seminars offered through fire associations:** Most, if not all of the fire instructors are still working in the fire service. Many of them are aware of testing opportunities and share them with the classes. You also get a chance to network with other candidates, and best of all, increase your education level while adding something beneficial to your resume. Many of the Fire Technology programs have bulletin boards that post jobs or training opportunities that you can view.
6. **Fire trade publication classified sections:** Fire service trade publications, such as Firehouse Magazine, occasionally have entry-level firefighter positions advertised. Subscribing to many of these publications not only educates you on the past, present, and future of the fire service, but also exposes you to any available positions that might be advertised.
7. **City or County Human Resource / Personnel Offices:** Many people are not aware that the fire department themselves are usually not the one that puts on a firefighter examination. It is usually the city or county human resource or personnel office. The names "human resource" and "personnel office" are usually synonymous. Every city and county has an office with either name that handles the testing for all of the city or county agencies within that jurisdiction such as the fire department, law enforcement, public works, recreational services, etc.

The fire department usually informs the human resources (H.R.) / personnel office that they need to hold a firefighter exam and then it is usually scheduled around all of the other examinations that are occurring.

8. **Fire Departments:** Besides contacting H.R. / Personnel departments, you should be contacting each fire department individually. Why? Because some fire departments like the one I work for don't utilize the County Personnel department for testing. We have a Personnel Services Manager who is in charge of testing and recruitment. That is

probably a unique situation you will encounter. Most fire departments utilize the HR / Personnel offices for testing. It gets back to always having a back-up plan. Don't rely solely on the information you were given by the H.R. / Personnel office. Things can change at the drop of a hat. As soon as I got off of the phone with the H.R. / Personnel office, I would contact the fire department themselves to see if I received similar information or conflicting information. Either way, I would thank the individuals for their assistance after taking down the information they provided to my questions.

While all of the above mentioned items are all of value when it comes to finding out who is testing, contacting each human resources / personnel office AND fire department directly is probably your best method of finding out who is testing!

Remember what I talked about in part 1: You must be in control of your own destiny! Don't expect to rely on others for information! If you do, you might miss out on that important test you have been waiting for!

While all of the above items are extremely important at assisting you in finding out which fire departments are currently testing, I sincerely believe the most important item is to do your own research and actually be proactive in your search. All of the above items, with the exception of # 7 & #8, directly contacting the human resource / personnel office and the fire department, are being reactive. Why? Because you are sitting back, waiting for someone to give you some information. That is not necessarily bad, just not the way you should go about achieving your dream of becoming a firefighter.

I think of items 1 through 6 as "back-up plans" to assist you in finding positions. Back up plans are necessary for almost everything we do in life, especially when it comes to achieving the dream of becoming a firefighter. I think of it the same as being similar to you making a copy of that important document (such as a job application), backing up that computer file that keeps your resume handy and up to date, or just keeping various financial records, documents, or valuables in a safety deposit box away from your residence.

In the next article, I will discuss how you can be **proactive** in your research at finding out which fire departments are testing, and what specific information you should be obtaining when you are performing your research.

To better organize all of this information you are going to be soon obtaining, I recommend getting a binder with some blank paper. This will be the storage location for the information that you obtain during your research. If you are extremely computer literate, then by all means feel free to develop a spread sheet or data base of some form or fashion. However, I prefer the binder because you can keep it with you at all times since it is portable. Future articles will go into other items that you can carry with you inside the binder to assist you with achieving your dream of becoming a firefighter!

Until next month, keep on believing in yourself and your abilities and don't lose focus on your most important goal – becoming a full-time paid firefighter! There is a badge out there with

your name on it. No one is going to hand it to you or lead you to it. It is up to you to go out there and find it. If you don't, somebody else will!