



## FIRE & EMS NEWS

September 2002

Volume 1 – Issue 3

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Welcome to the third issue of the Fire & EMS News! I hope you are finding this informative, interesting, and educational. This issue is going to focus on the basics of becoming a firefighter. This is by no means the list or formula that is going to get you hired. It is meant to be used to assist you prepare yourself to be the best you can be. Use this information to guide you in the right direction. Becoming a firefighter is a full-time job in itself! You have to live, sleep, and breathe becoming a firefighter. Those that can do the most to prepare themselves stand the best chance and getting hired the quickest. Expect to spend 3-5 years of full-time preparation & effort to see your dream come true.

### Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment Information

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*The Alameda County Fire Department is recruiting Volunteer Firefighters!*

The filing period is September 3, 2002 through October 15, 2002 at 5:00 pm. Requirements / qualifications include:

- **Age** – applicants must be at least 18 years old by 12/1/02
- **Licenses** – all candidates must possess a valid California Motor Vehicle Operator's license by time of appointment
- **Physical requirements** – applicants must be in excellent physical condition. Hearing must be normal in both ears. Visual acuity correctable to 20/30.
- **Residency** – candidates must live within Alameda County or 15 air miles from Alameda County Station 15, 5352 Broder Rd., Dublin, California upon appointment
- **Certificates** – current State of California Firefighter 1 and EMT -1. Candidates who don't currently possess Firefighter 1 and EMT certificates can compete in the process, and obtain a position as a volunteer firefighter, but must complete both certifications within one year of completing the volunteer academy.

For more information, visit their web site at <http://www.co.alameda.ca.us/fire/volunteer.shtml>

Applications can be picked up from and delivered to:

Alameda County Fire Department  
835 E. 14<sup>th</sup> St., Suite 200  
San Leandro, CA 94577  
510-618-3490

## Preparing yourself to become a firefighter

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There are many ways to prepare you to become a firefighter. Remember that you want to be **UNIQUE** in a positive way. You are truly competing against yourself, not the other candidates. The more you can prepare yourself, the better chance you stand at getting that badge! People ask me what classes to take to become a firefighter. My answer is that there is no “cookie-cutter” way to become a firefighter. What works for one person, might not work for you. Many students just want to get the bare minimum, which I feel is an EMT certificate, a firefighter 1 academy certificate, and maybe a certificate of achievement in Fire Technology. Many just finish the academy and don’t bother to complete the remaining three or four classes for their certificate of achievement. All of those qualifications should not be your stopping point; they are actually your starting point!

**Why** is that? Because look around at the competition. It seems like everyone has an EMT certificate, a firefighter 1 academy certificate, some fire technology classes, etc. Do departments require all of those things to take the test? Not really. Some require EMT certification or Paramedic licensure to take the test (bare minimum requirements). Some require one or both of those plus a firefighter 1 academy or firefighter 1 certificate. Some just require you to be 18 years old and have a high school diploma or GED. Think about it – if everyone has the bare minimum requirements or a notch above the bare minimum, what is going to separate you from them? **WHAT MAKES YOU *UNIQUE* COMPARED TO EVERYONE ELSE?**

**That** is what I want to concentrate on. Personally, to compete in today’s entry-level firefighter market; you should strive to obtain the following things (not in any particular order):

- **EMT certificate - MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT LET IT EXPIRE!**
- **Paramedic License - MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT LET IT EXPIRE!**
- **CPR for the Professional Rescuer (American Red Cross) or CPR Healthcare Provider (American Heart Association) – MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT LET IT EXPIRE!**
- **Firefighter 1 Academy certificate**
- **Firefighter 1 State certification**
- **Fire Technology – Certificate of Achievement**
- **Fire Technology – A.A. or A.S. Degree** – Even if you already have a four-year degree, I strongly suggest going for your two-year degree in Fire Technology. Why? Because it shows dedication to the career (my opinion). Some people ask me why should they get a two-year degree in Fire Technology, as opposed to just a Certificate of Achievement? Especially when they already have a four-year degree. Well, if you already have a four-year degree, you need to talk to a counselor and see which General Education units transfer to Chabot. I bet you’ll be able to transfer most of those units, leaving you with having to take one or two G.E. classes. One or two G.E. classes to get a two-year degree (as opposed to just the Certificate of achievement? That’s a no-brainer. Do it! A Certificate of achievement in Fire Technology looks better than nothing. An A.A. looks better than a Certificate. A B.S or B.A. looks better than an A.A. degree. A Master’s degree looks better than a B.S. or B.A. Get my point?

- **Volunteer experience** – I don't care what type of experience, just do something and do it well! Here is a great way to do something unique. People are always looking to become volunteer firefighters. That is great, but here you can really shine if you find some unique way to serve your community. See the Volunteer Opportunities on the Chabot College Fire Technology & EMS web site for more ideas.
- **EMT experience on an ambulance or in a hospital** (full-time or part-time) – Firefighters respond to over 60% EMS calls in most jurisdictions. Do you think departments want inexperienced EMT's? Also, if you want to go to paramedic school, you usually need EMT experience. See the Jobs section on the Chabot College Fire Technology & EMS web site for more ideas.
- **Ambulance Driver's License** – If you want to work with a Private Ambulance Company (such as AMR), you will need an ambulance driver's license. It is available through any DMV office. Full-time firefighters working for a fire department that provides ambulance transportation services do not need ambulance driver's licenses.
- **Specialized Training Certificates** – Examples include Public Education 1, Fire Prevention 1A and 1B, Fire Investigation 1A, Auto Extrication, Rescue Systems 1, Confined Space Awareness & Operations, Swift Water Rescue, Hazardous Materials First Responder – Operational, Decontamination, Technician, or Specialist. These are classes certified through such agencies as the Office of the State Fire Marshal or California Specialized Training Institute. See the Training Opportunities section on the Chabot College Fire Technology & EMS web site for more ideas.
- **Bilingual Ability** – If you don't presently speak a second language, immediately attempt to do so. Many departments give preference to bilingual candidates when hiring and some departments in Southern California (Santa Ana F.D., Garden Grove F.D., etc.) require EMT, FF-1, & a fluency in a second language just to take the test! Some people think they have to speak Spanish to be bilingual. While Spanish is an excellent second language to learn, there are other languages. A good friend of mine speaks Russian. How many other candidates speak Russian? Probably very few. Does that make him unique in a positive way? YES! He might be the only person on the Stockton Fire Department that speaks Russian (as opposed to a batch that speaks Spanish).
- **Clean driving record** – This includes no accidents and no traffic tickets. Why is this important? At some point, you will be driving fire apparatus. If you have proven yourself to be a driver with accidents and traffic tickets on your record, how are you going to prove you're going to be an excellent driver that the public and your crew demands and deserves? Nobody is perfect. If you've had issues in the past, now is the time to prove to the fire departments that you really want to become a firefighter and that you've turned your life around. I wouldn't want someone that can't drive their personal vehicle safely, driving our crew around the city in our \$300,000 fire engine!
- **Excellent Physical Fitness** – If you don't have a physical fitness routine now, you need to get one! Pair up with a buddy or two and get a routine. Preferably you are able to get guidance from a professional on what to do and how to do it to obtain the maximum results. Weight lifting alone won't cut it! You need to have a combination of aerobic activities, cardiovascular activities, and muscular / strength-building activities. Don't forget your diet!

- **Memberships & Affiliations** – Start getting involved in the Fire Service. There are organizations you can join as a student that will give you more insight on the career you plan to spend the rest of your working years in (at least I assume you do). Many of these organizations provide a monthly newsletter. Examples include:
  - California State Firefighters Association
  - Northern California Fire Prevention Officers Association
  - San Francisco Paramedic Association

Here is another way you can be unique, while also educating yourself on the fire service. For more information on these and more organizations, go to the LINKS section of the Chabot College Fire Technology & EMS Web site.

- **Fire Service / EMS Publications** – There are many of them that you can use to better educate yourself on current trends in the fire service. Some of the best choices include:
  - Fire Engineering Magazine
  - Firehouse Magazine
  - Journal of Emergency Services Magazine (JEMS)
  - California Fire Service (Free with your California State Firefighters Association membership)

Each of the above publications is listed in the LINKS section of the Chabot College Fire Technology & EMS Web site. Go there to obtain more information or to see other similar publications. Firehouse and Fire Engineering even have email update services (free of charge) where they send you daily updates. I've had interviews in the past where they asked me what are some current trends in the fire service and I was able to talk about the information I had obtained from such publications.

Now I apologize if I discouraged any of you after looking at that list. ***If anything, I hoped I motivated you to strive to be the best you can be!*** Don't think you have to get every one of those items done to become a firefighter. Some get hired with very little (or none) of the requirements and some have almost all of the requirements. **THERE IS NO GUARANTEED FORMULA ON BECOMING A FIREFIGHTER!** I'm just trying to give you suggestions to help guide your way. Remember, having some of the above requirements might allow you to take the test (minimum requirements) or compete with the other candidates, but getting hired still comes down to that 10-20 minute oral interview that is weighted 100% of your overall score.

If you cannot sell your qualifications or market yourself properly, you're not going to get the job! Just because you have it on paper or have done it in the past, doesn't mean you can communicate effectively what you have done. That communication is done in the oral interview, whenever you encounter a person related to the organization you're attempting to get hired onto, on your application, and on your resume (if you're allowed to turn in a resume).

**SUMMARY:**

The information contained is my opinion, based on my experience and education. Remember the saying about opinions, they're like stomachs (I know, I changed the word that usually goes there) – everyone has a stomach. There are many right ways to do something. Not just the way that a firefighter told you, whether they are your neighbor, your friend, or a relative. Remember that what worked for that person getting hired, might not work for you. They did something right to get them their badge. Respect their opinion and listen to what they have to say. **YOU CAN LEARN SOMETHING FROM EVERY**

FIREFIGHTER OR EX-FIREFIGHTER. Just don't get locked into "one person's opinion."

I CHALLENGE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU TO FIND OUT AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ABOUT BECOMING A FIREFIGHTER! I am a **resource** to you, just like many other firefighters or ex-firefighters are. The information I provide you with is for you to use as you feel appropriate. Talk to as many people as you can to get information on becoming a firefighter. That way, you will not get locked into just "one person's opinion." *Remember – you are in control of your own destiny! What you make of your life is up to you and the effort and hard work you put into getting what you want.*

### Web Sites of the Month

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**Fire Department:** Union City Fire Dept. - <http://www.ci.union-city.ca.us/fire/fire.html>  
**Ambulance Company:** Westmed Ambulance – <http://www.westmedambulance.com>  
**Fire / EMS Publication:** Fire Times On-line Magazine – <http://www.firetimes.com>  
**Fire Organization:** International Association of Firefighters - <http://www.iaff.org>  
**EMS Organization:** California State EMS Agency - <http://www.emsa.cahwnet.gov>

### Closing Comments

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I hope you have found this newsletter somewhat valuable. If you have learned one new thing, then I think I've done my job. I truly want to see everyone succeed, and I also really enjoy doing what I do. This program is your program. It can only get better with your assistance. There is an old saying, don't just give me problems – give me solutions! I can't read your minds, so please provide me with feedback. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or want me to clarify any rumors you might have heard. Thank you very much!

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