

Williamson County ESD No. 7



Strategic Plan
2023 to 2026

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Open Letter

A Message from Chief
Cummings

In April of 2022, I was afforded the opportunity to become the fire chief of Williamson County ESD No. 7. In order to provide comprehensive emergency service to our district and visitors of the greater Florence-Andice Area, WCESD No. 7 must proactively respond to those changes, solve problems, collaborate on issues, assess community needs, and develop viable solutions. To accomplish this goal, the following Strategic Planning document was developed. This report is designed to provide members of our district the community, with a three to five-year planning document. With the ever-changing growth in our district, this plan will be a living document capable of being evaluated, reviewed, and refined on an annual basis. It is my goal to provide the district with a well-trained, and well-equipped organization to meet with ever changing needs of the community.

I would like to thank the commissioners, community, and the heart of the organization, the fire fighters, for providing me the opportunity to facilitate the development of a document that will guide the future of the Williamson County ESD No. 7. As an organization, we stand committed to accepting the challenge of cultivating these strategic goals into reality, enhancing the services we offer our district, and meeting our future vision.

I would like to invite the community to view our web page at <https://www.wilcoesd7.org/> and to like our Facebook page under Williamson County ESD 7/ Florence Fire Department. We will do our best to keep this site updated with the latest information. The Departments General email address is admin@wilcoesd7.org.

Michael Ray Cummings, EFO
Fire Chief
WCESD No. 7
rcummings@wcesd7.org

Process

Data collection began by conducting a survey to examine our strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT). The data would give a perspective from the internal stake holders point of view on the ESDs SWOT. Strengths and weaknesses are internal to our organization. The opportunities and threats are external.

The participation level was good with much communication and input. This information was used in the development of this strategic plan. The below chart indicates the items identified in the SWOT analysis.

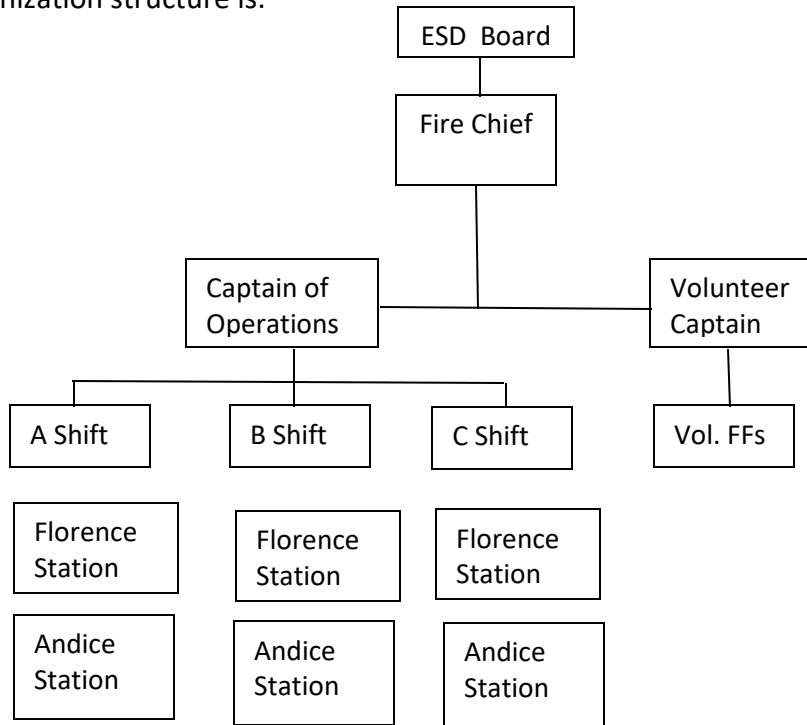
SWOT Analysis Summary

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced Officers • NFPA compliant turnout gear • Latest IT equipment in apparatus • Some members continuing education and learning new skill sets • Willingness to learn • Increase competencies • Ownership and teamwork • ESD board Support 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weakness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced/tenure members • Apparatus update and replacement • Need additional staffing • Future need for Aerial Apparatus • Ability to recruit members • No experience of new fire fighters • Retaining members • Lack of EMS units in district • Lack of wellness and fitness program
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New stations • Promotions • Rapid expanding district • Training to expand knowledge and skill levels, ALS • EMS housed in an ESD fire station • Building a strong culture • Info. Tech proficiency • Community Engagement 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low experience levels • Budgetary constraints due to tax base • Changes in technology • Rapid Growth of District • Aging vehicle fleet • Increased call volume • Retention of Employees • Benefits (remaining competitive) • Other Cities annexing district

Organizational Background

The WCESD No. 7 is a career and volunteer emergency service district that provides fire, EMS, rescue, fire prevention and education services to the communities of Florence and Andice. Our service district covers 134 square miles. WCESD No. 7 currently has 15 career fire fighters assigned to fire operations and 5 active volunteer fire fighters. The ESDs has 2 fire stations. The Florence station is located at 301 S. Patterson and the Andice station is located at 14955 RR 2338. Each station is staffed with two personnel on a three-shift 48/96 hour rotating schedule. Additionally, fire admin consists of a Fire Chief, a Captain of Operations and an Administrative Manager.

The current organization structure is:



ECONOMIC / DEMOGRAPHIC HISTORY

Emergency Services Districts (ESDs) are local political subdivisions of the State of Texas that may provide fire, rescue, emergency medical services (EMS) and other emergency services. ESDs are designed to ensure adequate funding of local fire, EMS, rescue, and other emergency services. Emergency Services Districts are NOT a municipal or county entity.

An important principle behind ESDs is to spread the funding for vital emergency services amongst everyone within the District that might depend on those services. ESDs are primarily funded by an ad valorem (property) tax that, under the State of Texas Constitution, cannot exceed \$0.10 per \$100 of property valuation. ESDs may also levy a sales and use tax for additional funding. ESD tax revenues mean more time to focus on training and the provision of emergency services rather than fundraising and other activities. Through stable funding, many established ESDs

have reduced fire and medical response times and allowed local entities to provide enhanced services, thus saving lives, property, and funds for local citizens.

As a political subdivision of the State of Texas, an ESD may: (1) acquire, purchase, hold, lease, manage, occupy, and sell real and personal property or an interest in property; (2) enter into and perform necessary contracts; (3) appoint and employ necessary officers, agents, and employees. (4) sue and be sued; (7) impose and collect taxes as prescribed by this chapter; (6) accept and receive donations; (7) lease, own, maintain, operate, and provide emergency services vehicles and other necessary or proper apparatus, instrumentalities, equipment, and machinery to provide emergency services: (8) construct, lease, own, and maintain real property, improvements, and fixtures necessary to house, repair, and maintain emergency services vehicles and equipment; (9) contract with other entities, including other districts or municipalities, to make emergency services facilities and emergency services available to the district; (10) contract with other entities, including other districts or municipalities, for reciprocal operation of services and facilities if the contracting parties find that reciprocal operation would be mutually beneficial and not detrimental to the district; (11) borrow money; and (12) perform other acts necessary to carry out the intent of Chapter 777 of the Texas Health and Safety Code.

ESD Taxing Authority

As a governmental entity, the primary source of funds for an ESD is tax revenue. An ESD has two primary methods of securing this revenue – *Ad Valorem (Property) Tax* and *Sales and Use Tax*. An ESD may impose an ad valorem tax on all real and personal property within the district that is subject to taxation. The current maximum allowable rate of taxation for some ESDs across the state is \$0.10/\$100 of valuation. WCESD 7's Ad Valorem tax rate is the voter approval tax rate of 0.086729/\$100.

ESDs are also one of a select group of local political subdivisions that are eligible to levy a local sales and use tax, subject to voter approval. The maximum sales tax rate in Texas is 8.25%. Of that number, 6.25% is reserved and collected by the State of Texas. The remaining 2% sales tax rate is available for ESDs to collect in increments of 1/8% up to 2% if it is available. In 2020 voters of the district approved a 2% sales tax rate for WCESD 7 in areas inside the district.

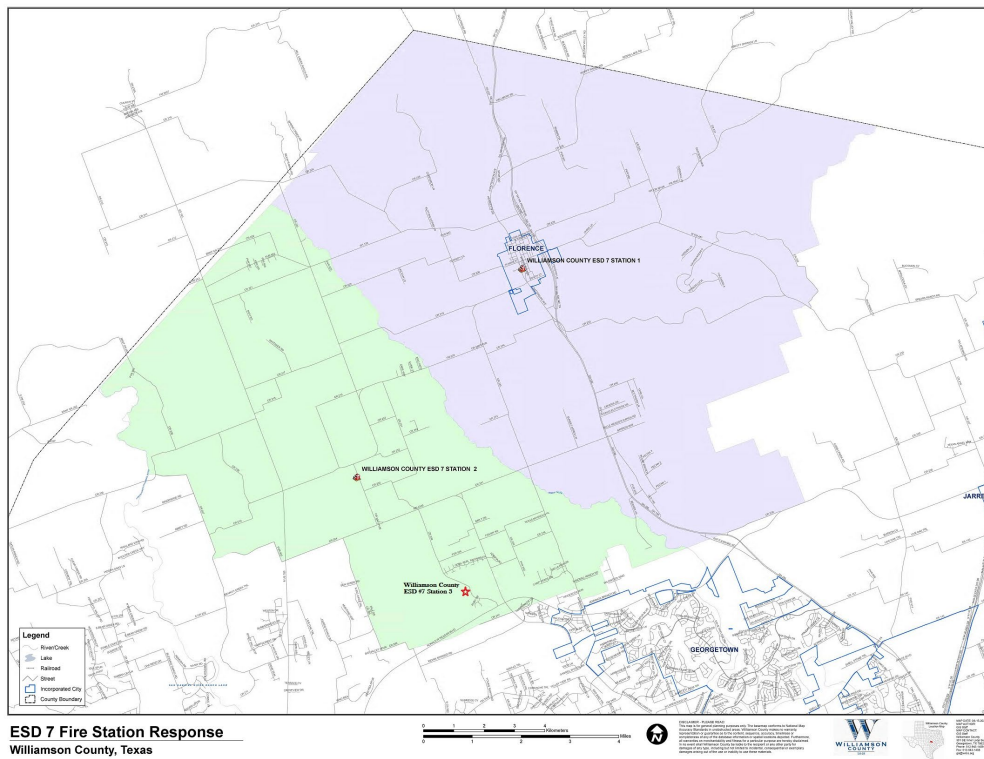
Williamson County Emergency Services District #7

In fiscal year 23/24, WCESD #7 will spend approximately 59.96% total on human resources to include: payroll, health insurance, retirement, and training. The remaining 40.04% is spent on operational expenses and capital items to include: building and apparatus maintenance, utilities, fuel, fleet insurance and bank loan payments for apparatus and a fire stations.

Through the budget process, WCESD #7 works to keep equipment repaired and replaced, and existing personnel employed. Yet while this budget pays for everything identified during the budget year, there are expenses that are unforeseen. Additionally, a lag between the arrival of business growth and the monies available to purchase needed equipment and supplies, it takes Williamson County 24 months from a building's completion to be appraised and for tax dollars to be distributed. Yet while WCESD #7 is not able to receive the added tax revenue for at least 2-years, WCESD #7 is still responsible to protect the property from the day construction begins. Subsequently these new expenses must be absorbed into the current year's budget.

Demographics

WCESD 7 has undergone a transformation over the past decade from a rural Texas to one of Texas' fastest growing areas. As a fire department in a suburban area, WCESD 7 is responsible for providing a variety of emergency services which includes structure fires, wildland fires, hazardous materials incidents, medical emergencies, motor vehicle collisions, and swift water rescues. WCESD 7 protects a growing population of approximately 15,000 residents which include ranch land, low-income and high-income residential neighborhoods, with some located in the wildland-urban interface areas. These homes range from 1- and 2-family single story dwellings.



Insurance Service Office Rating

Williamson County ESD 7 is rated as a 3/3X by the Insurance Service Office. Insurance companies use this score to assist with setting home-owners insurance rates. According to ISO's Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS), four main criteria comprise a fire rating score:

- 50% comes from the quality of your local fire department, including staffing levels, training, and proximity of the firehouse.
- 40% comes from availability of water supply, including the prevalence of fire hydrants and how much water is available to put out fires.
- 10% comes from the quality of the area's emergency communications systems (911).
- An extra 5.5% comes from community outreach, including fire prevention and safety courses.
- Any area that is more than five driving miles from the nearest fire station is automatically **rated a 10**.

Department Mission

The Mission of Williamson County ESD # 7 is to provide the best emergency response possible to our citizens, our neighboring fire departments and those that pass through our jurisdiction, by preparing to the best of our ability, and to respond to all emergency call types to which we are summoned.

Vision Statement

Williamson County Emergency Services District #7 (the district) recognizes the responsibility placed upon our organization to provide essential emergency services to our citizens. The district also recognizes the value of human life and dignity. Our philosophy, which embodies our organizational values and beliefs, provides a guide for members in the performance of daily activities.

Core Values

- PRIDE • COURAGE • RESPECT • HONOR



Our core values are addressed on our department's uniform patch. These core values are what drives our members to preform the best possible job for the district.

WCESD 7 Beliefs

- People are our most important asset
- We must respect and support each other as individual human beings with differing values and needs
- We must be loyal to profession and our community
- We are responsible and accountable for our own successes or failures
- We must not dishonor our profession or the community in which we serve
- Individual performance and team performance will be recognized
- We must encourage and support others
- Each of us should strive to grow and develop professionally
- Teamwork is essential
- Open communication will be the cultural norm
- Innovation is critical to the organization
- We must provide all services, in which we are asked to perform, to the highest level attainable

Department Goals

Equipment and Apparatus

- Developed and keep updated 20-year apparatus replacement plan.
- Develop a strategical plan which is updated every 3 to 5 years.
- Developed an equipment PPE replacement plan to meet NFPA standards.
- Purchased new technical rescue equipment to assist in the areas of swift water rescue.
- Purchase an aerial apparatus to meet the needs of commercial and multi-family developments in the district
- Purchase or redesign an apparatus to protect members while working on high-speed roadways
- Upgrade or replace the current support vehicle to a command vehicle
- Upgrade and Implement wildland firefighting equipment
- Upgrade current SCBA's

Training - In Service and Other

- Shift officers and the fire chief developed, planned, and scheduled trainings.
- Outside training occurs at varies location including TEEX (College Station) and our neighbors to the south, Georgetown Fire Department
- NMCG task books for wildland fire fighting are in place
 - the goal is to have all members obtain the national certified wildland fire fighter level of FF1/IMT7
- EMS training continues to be provided by Career Cert. This will give basic training necessary for duty for members to maintain their EMT certification.

Command Structure

- Chain of command is being enforced by having members report up through their assigned Lieutenant and then to the Captain of Operations. This will help with streamlining problem resolution. All members are aware of and know they need to follow this chain of command. "End A Rounding" will not be tolerated, since it breeds distrust.

Policies and Procedures/Rules and Regulations

- SOPs have been reviewed at the command staff level and will be updated as needed to align with neighboring agencies.

Professional Development

- Members who want to advance and enhance their knowledge have been encouraged to take classes.
- A list of desired certifications for advancement has been outlined in a task book for the positions of Driver and Lieutenant.
- All officers are to obtain their Blue Card Command Certification
- The State of Texas offers waivers for career firefighters to advance their formal education. Our members are encouraged to use this waver.

Communications

- Staff meetings have been held on quarterly basis.
- ESD commissioner meetings are held on a monthly basis
- Lieutenants are encouraged to seek and bring back information to their members from these meetings.
- Continue to work with various press/social media about accomplishments and happenings.

Community Engagement

- Provide for a prevention program
- Establish an entry level Fire Recruitment and Training Program for high school students

Board of Commissioners

The Board of Commissioners is the appointed policy-making body for the Williamson County Emergency Services District No.7. The Commissioners provide financial oversight and strategic policy direction to maximize the public value of District services. The board members are appointed by the County Precinct 3, Commissioner Valerie Covey, and are limited to 5 members maximum, who serve a two-year term. If you would like to serve on the board, please contact commissioner Covey. ESD meetings are open to the public. ESD meetings are held @ 6pm - 14955 RR 2338, the fire station in Andice.

2023 WCESD No. 7 Board of Commissioners are:

Keith Couch, President
kcouch@wcesd7.org

Mark Bell, Vice President
mbell@wcesd7.org

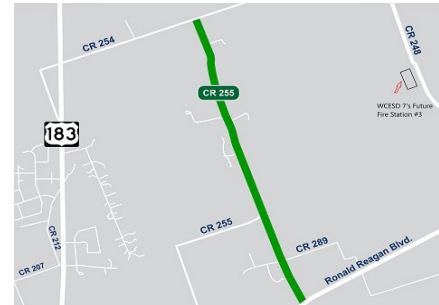
Laura Anderson, Treasurer
landerson@wcesd7.org

James Shofner, Board Member
jshofner@wcesd.7.org

Darrel Warren, Board Member
dwarren@wilcoesd7.org

Strategic Planning Topics

Strategic Planning Topic #1 – Facilities



A fire station must support the needs of the fire department and the community in which it is located. It needs to accommodate extremely diverse functions, including housing, recreation, administration, training, community education, equipment and vehicle storage, equipment and vehicle maintenance and various types of storage abilities. While it is usually only occupied by fire personnel, the facility may also need to accommodate the public for community education or outreach programs. Fire stations will vary somewhat in design depending on specific mission, i.e., the types of emergencies that will be responded to or the types of fires that will be fought. Usually, the facility differences relate to the size of the firefighting apparatus and facility location. The location of the facility is largely driven by the need to minimize response time.

Station 1 is located, in Florence, at 301 S. Patterson. A remodel is needed to bring this station up to date. A remodel of this station is scheduled to be completed by the end of calendar year 2024.

Station 2 is located, in Andice, at 14955 RR 2338.

Station 3 will be located on County Road 248 on the North side of Nolina subdivision, approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from Ronald Reagan Blvd. The architectural plans will begin in budget year 23/24 and construction should begin in budget year 24/25. We anticipate the station will open in budget year 26/27.

BUILDING ATTRIBUTES of a Fire Station

Space Types and Building Organization

Major fire station functional areas include the following:

- Apparatus bay(s): This is where the fire fighting and emergency response vehicles are stored.
- Apparatus bay support and vehicle maintenance: These industrial spaces are where the vehicles and other firefighting equipment are cleaned, maintained, and stored.
- Administrative and training areas: These include offices, dispatch facilities, and training/conference rooms.
- Residential areas: These include the dorm rooms, day room/kitchen, and residential support areas such as bathrooms and fitness spaces.
- Specialized areas: These include decontamination rooms and emergency operations center rooms.

Apparatus Bay Support and Vehicle Maintenance

Apparatus bay support functions include cleaning and maintenance areas for the firefighter's self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), protective clothing, fire hose, and equipment. It also includes storage areas for firefighting gear and equipment and secure storage for medical supplies. Some of these areas are specialized spaces for disinfecting protective equipment and for maintaining and recharging the SCBA in a clean environment.

Administrative, Training Areas and Day Rooms

Administrative areas include standard offices and conference and training rooms. The area will also likely include additional specialized spaces such as the chief's office with sleeping and shower facilities and computer training/testing facilities for firefighter continuing education. Some stations may include a highly specialized dispatch room for receiving emergency calls from the public.

The day room accommodates kitchen, dining, and living/recreation functions. It is often separated into subspaces for those three functions, but an open design may also be effective to encourage interaction between the spaces. The dining space may also double as training or meeting space and might include provisions for audiovisual equipment.

Dorm room design can vary widely from station to station and department to department. Each firefighter is provided with a place to sleep, work, and store personal items. Careful consideration should be given to the location and design of the area to ensure response times can be met.

Other residential areas include a laundry room, a physical fitness room, bathrooms and showers, etc.

Fire stations are occupied 24 hours a day, seven days a week by personnel in continuous 24-hour shifts. Therefore, ensuring a comfortable living environment for the firefighters is paramount:

- Provide ample natural light.
- Provide individual dorm rooms.
- Provide ample recreation areas and separate noisy areas (exercise room) from quieter areas (such as a television or study room).
- Avoid institutional and unnatural finishes, textures, and colors.

Maintain a Safe and Healthy Environment

As above, due to the continuous occupation of the facility by firefighters and the presence of hazardous materials, special attention must be given to designing the facility to accommodate equipment and operational strategies to both protect the occupants and maintain a healthy environment. Consider the following critical elements:

WCESD No. 7 Strategic Plan

- Provide a secure facility for both personnel and materials such as controlled medical supplies and hazardous fire suppression agents.
- Ensure good indoor air quality and abundant natural light in the residential and administrative areas.
- Ensure good ventilation of industrial areas such as the apparatus bay and prevent contamination of clean spaces such as the SCBA maintenance areas.

Strategic Planning Topic #2 - Apparatus



Just as technology changes in the private sector, technology evolves in the fire service as well. The equipment we use is constantly being upgraded by NFPA standards. There is also the possibility of defective and damaging equipment during operations and training. This equipment must be replaced and comply with the latest standard possible. If vehicles are not replaced on a regular basis, this can affect the district's ISO rating and have an increase in cost and repairs. The typical life span for a fire engine is 15-17 years as an industry standard. The average cost of a fire engine is \$500,000. The average cost of a Tactical Water Tender, Squad and/or Mini-Pumper is \$375,000. These average cost are for the apparatus alone, not included are the cost of equipment placed on each apparatus. The build out time for these apparatus are 2 years from the date ordered.

Due to the high cost of fire apparatus, a plan needs to be implemented to replace this equipment on a regular basis either through the budgetary process or capital planning. Additionally, as the district adds structures vertical in nature, such as apartment buildings, hotels and large commercial structures, the district will need to purchase an aerial type of fire apparatus. This type of apparatus will allow firefighters to perform rescues from balconies and elevated windows. Fire personnel will be able to access roof structures in a safe manner with an aerial device. Below is a photo of an aerial apparatus. The average cost of a new ladder truck in 2023 is \$2,500,000.



OBJECTIVES:

1. Develop a contingent plan to purchase new equipment and or technology not yet used by the department.
2. Form a committee to design the specs for an aerial apparatus
3. Purchase an aerial apparatus in FY 27/28.
4. Purchase an (2) Engines in FY 23/24.
5. Purchase a Squad in FY 23/24.

Strategic Planning Topic #3 - Hiring and Retention of Personnel



The ESD will need to hire the staff to increase staffing levels from three personnel per shift at each station to four personnel per shift at each station. This will provide for a minimum of 8 personnel to staff between 3 rotating shifts for 365 days a year.

When Station 3 goes online in fiscal year 26/27, The ESD will need to hire 12 personnel to staff that station. This will add an additional 4 firefighters a shift.

To compete with departments in the Williamson County and Travis County area, the ESD will need to be competitive with both pay and retirement benefits.

Objectives:

1. To conduct salary surveys every two years and adjust ESD 7 's pay scale as needed
 - a. In budget year 23/24 a new step pay plan was implemented
 - b. Competitive increase will be evaluated each year
2. Increase retirement in 2023 to a 1:1.5 match and in 2024 to a 1:2 match

Strategic Planning Topic #4- Replacement of Aging Equipment

The equipment we use is constantly being upgraded by NFPA standards. A major piece of equipment used by fire fighters to protect them from respiratory injuries is a self-contained breathing apparatus or a SCBA. The ESD currently uses a MSA SCBA that was manufactured under NFPA 2007. These SCBA will be ending their life span soon. The ESD plans on transitioning to a SCOTT SCBA. The cost of a new SCBA is approximately \$10,000 ea.

Objective:

1. Replace three to four SCBA's a year over the next three years

Strategic Planning Topic #5 - Training - In Service and Other



As fire departments take on more responsibilities and duties while becoming an all-hazard mitigation department more training and expertise is often needed. We can see a greater increase in the number of wildland and medical aid calls that we respond to. As medical skills become a more pertinent job function, the member must invest in and increase their training knowledge in this discipline.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Provide the Company Officers with the means to conduct in-service training
2. Continue having the training officer schedule and teach standard training exercises, with all department members, in order to establish consistency and proficiency in everyday firefighting evolutions and skills.
3. Train with neighboring departments
4. Have all members certified as wildland fire fighters through the NWCG (**National Wildfire Coordinating Group**).
5. Advance our firefighters technical skills by sending members to hazardous material, swift water, ropes and extrication courses.
6. Train and upgrade skill of EMT-Basics to become EMT-Advanced

Strategic Planning Topic #6 – improve Medical Response and Transport Services within ESD 7



WCESD #7 is the largest ESD in Williamson County *without* an EMS medic unit housed within the ESD. Williamson County EMS does have a single paramedic on a squad/command type vehicle stationed at the

Florence station, but if an emergency transport to a medical facility is required, typically a medic unit from Jarrell or Liberty Hill must respond in order to provide that service to a patient. In many situations, time is a factor in patient survival. If a transport unit must respond from another city to transport, that golden hour of survival time has been greatly diminished.

The ESD recognizes that it will be critical to work with Williamson County EMS, in an attempt, to have a medic unit stationed within ESD #7. WCESD 7 currently has personnel who are at the Advanced EMT and paramedic level. Our goal is to have all Fire Fighters trained to the EMT advance level of medical care within the next 3 years, so our firefights care provide advance life saving skills prior to the arrival of a medical transport unit.

OBJECTIVE:

1. To work with WCEMS to place a transport medic unit in district at the Andice Fire Station
2. Have all WCESD 7 FF's medically trained as an EMT-Advance
3. Have the current Paramedics and EMT-Advance personnel credentialed through WCEMS

Strategic Planning Topic #7 - Policies and Procedures/Rules and Regulations

Policies and procedures are often referred to as SOPs, or Standard Operating Procedures in the Fire Service. Standard operating policies and procedures of the Fire Department are the backbone of the department and ensure that standard procedures are being conducted the same way by all staff.

As new technology and emerging trends in the fire service SOPs need to be reviewed and possibly created. Reviewing SOPs on a regular basis contributes to a favorable ISO rating as this is part of the evaluation. The goal is to keep current on this on-going process. The SOPs have been reviewed and updated by the department's command staff.

OBJECTIVE:

4. Distribute updated Policies and Procedures and Rules and Regulations manuals with up-to-date SOGs

Appendix A – Call Volume

Type of Call	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Building Fires	15	5	11	16	15
Vehicle Fires	7	13	8	8	17
Other Outside Fires	56	72	50	78	51
Medical Calls	355	279	399	350	355
Motor Vehicle Accident	129	160	147	152	120
Alarm Activations Response	9	3	13	73	61
Service Calls	30	69	32	65	21
False Alarms/Good Intent	83	68	73	94	50
Hazardous Material Responses	2	1	2	0	1
All Other Responses	44	31	52	63	25
Total Calls	730	701	712	899	716

Note – in 2020 a reduction in medical assist calls occurred as a result of policies put in place to limit covid exposures to emergency personnel by WC EMS.

Firefighter's Prayer

When I am called to duty, God wherever flames may rage, give me strength to save a life, whatever be its age. Help me to embrace a little child before it's too late, or save an older person from the horror of that fate. Enable me to be alert to hear the weakest shout, and quickly and efficiently to put the fire out. I want to fill my calling and to give the best in me, to guard my neighbor and protect his property. And if according to your will I have to lose my life, bless with your protecting hand my loving family from strife.