

Welcome to Mountain Communities Volunteer Fire Department

Congratulations! Getting involved with a volunteer fire department is an incredibly rewarding way to make a positive contribution to your community. That said, it is not something that everyone can undertake. It takes a great deal of physical and mental strength to make this kind of commitment. You'll be expected to keep a clear head in life-or-death situations and maintain your composure when assisting with traumatic events. You will find yourself in extremely dangerous situations, and ensuring the safety of yourself and others is the number one goal.

MCVFD strongly prefers that you live or own property within the district. Otherwise, we would like that you live nearby enough to make your response time within useful limits. If neither of these are the case, we can work with you to determine how often you can be in district for trainings, responses, etc.

MCVFD does not require a minimum time-of-service quota, but in order for us to invest in your training, you will be expected to serve the department as frequently as possible. You must have time in your schedule and the flexibility to make that work – not just for calls, but also for the trainings, meetings, station work, and many other duties that take place between emergencies. You must also commit to maintaining a level of physical strength and stamina necessary for firefighting and medical emergency tasks.

If firefighting or medical response isn't your calling, there are many other functions and responsibilities that you can volunteer for that are equally important to keeping MCVFD running. Fund raising, office work, maintaining equipment, dispatching and washing vehicles are all important. We can work with you to find how you can best serve the department and the community.

Thank you for your interest in making this commitment as a member of MCVFD. We look forward to a long, rewarding, and mutually beneficial partnership!

What is Expected of You

The only requirements that we place on any new member are being over the age of 18, a positive attitude, an eagerness for learning new skills, no aversion to hard work, and a desire to compassionately assist people regardless of color or creed. Beyond that, you should have the time to attend meetings and trainings on a regular basis.

We perform basic background checks as part of the application process. Past indiscretions aren't necessarily a cause for rejection, but we must ensure applicants are not a danger to themselves, the department, or the community. Feel free to discuss, in full confidentiality, anything with us that may concern you.

Being a member of MCVFD also means you agree to comport yourself with local, state and federal laws. When on active duty, you should maintain a clean and professional appearance and demeanor. Be aware that whenever you wear a department shirt, jacket or other gear in public, you are portraying yourself as a member of the department and should conduct your behavior as if being on duty.

We expect you to keep strict and absolute patient confidentiality. This is a legal mandate (HIPAA), and there are serious repercussions for violation of this agreement.

We also expect you to keep yourself in good physical and mental condition, and we provide training in this area. Safety is paramount, and taking care of yourself is the foundation of your own safety as well as the safety of others.

We expect you to take care of your family and loved ones, first and foremost. Do not let the responsibilities of being a member come before the responsibilities of family. If this is ever seen as an issue, please do not hesitate to discuss it with an officer of the department.

Finally, we expect you to HAVE FUN. This is serious business, and we work hard and we train hard, but we also have a really great time.

What You Can Expect from Us

We will provide all the training you need, for every aspect of department membership that you are interested in. The most urgent needs of the district we serve is for medical response and wildland firefighting, and we can quickly bring you up to speed in both of those areas. We encourage every member to take their training as far as they wish. The further you want to go, the better you can serve the community, and we will support you every step of the way.

As you complete various trainings, we will begin to supply you with appropriate gear, such as a radio and pager, wildland and bunker gear, medical kits, and so on. All of your training and gear will be paid for and supplied by the department. Some items are required to remain at the station when not in use, and other items you will keep with you. Understand that any gear issued to you remains the property of the department, and must be returned if you are no longer an active member of MCVFD.

We will act as your trainers, your supervisors, and your mentors, but all members of the department should be seen as colleagues. We are here to help each other grow and develop our skills as public servants, but we are also here to support each other at the mental and emotional level. We provide resources to assist in every aspect of being a department member. We deal with many tough and trying situations, and how we react and reflect upon them is a very important part of doing this type of work. No one should ever feel alone with any issue that arises. We are all in this together, and together we make it all work. Rely on your teammates and your department, and understand there is always a solution to any problem.

Above all, we strive to maintain and ensure your safety. This is done via many trainings and exercises, and safety is strictly observed before, during and after every call. You cannot defend life and property if you become a hazard or a victim yourself, but you cannot let anyone else's emergency become your own. It is dangerous work, and we must minimize the danger by making safety the top priority. Of course, we maintain coverage for you in case of accident, injury or death, but we will all work together to minimize that possibility.

Required Training

You will begin your path to becoming a department member under probationary status. The only required training to becoming a full MCVFD member is the completion of four selected FEMA National Incident Management System and Incident Command System courses, introducing you to the command and operation structure used on any incident of any size. Part of our department funding requires that our members have ICS training. We are often requested to work with other agencies for larger incidents in and around our district, and the ICS system allows all Fire, EMS, Law Enforcement, and many other agencies to work as a seamless whole.

The ICS courses are free, and can be completed online in just a few hours. Once you complete the courses, you will be awarded certificates that you can print. Having completed these courses, your probationary period will be eligible for expiration and you can be added to the roster and may continue with additional Fire and/or EMS training.

Find the courses and instructions here: <https://training.fema.gov/is/nims.aspx>

The four courses required are: IS-100.b, IS-200.b, IS-700.a, and IS-800.b. If you have any questions about NIMS and ICS, feel free to speak with a department officer.

By completing these ICS courses in your initial probation period, you will have demonstrated to us a level of commitment as well as meeting the minimum basic requirements of the department.

After you have completed your NIMS and ICS training and have moved out of your probation period, the next training we require is a CPR/AED course, then you may move on to the Basic Wildland Firefighting course and the Emergency Medical Responder course. Both of these courses will be described in the next two sections.

Wildland Firefighting Training

On average, we run about 70% medical emergency calls and about 30% fire related calls. Although we get more medical than fire incidents, we do ask that your next phase of training be wildland firefighting. The main reason behind this being the course is available online and can be taken at any time, at your own pace.

The wildland course we start with is actually several courses taught as one, and is offered by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group. You must be affiliated with a fire department or other fire suppression agency to apply. It consists of S-190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior, S-130 Basic Wildland Firefighting (both are online classes), a field day where you will take part in exercises and hands-on training scenarios, fire shelter training, and other activities, and finally a Pack Test that serves as a physical assessment of your strength and stamina towards firefighting safety.

The online courses can be done in about a week if your time permits. The field day and the Pack Test need to be scheduled, but you should be able to have your initial fire training accomplished within a month or two.

Once you have successfully completed this group of training, you will be awarded your "Red Card," officially known as the Task Book. The Task Book will serve as your permanent career record, and each fire or incident you work will allow you to add skills to this book, along with any further training you may wish to accomplish. There are literally hundreds of tasks and courses you can take as you move up and gain experience fighting wildland fires. If you are considering a paid career in firefighting, this Task Book is your gateway!

In order to be allowed to fight fires, you must complete this group of trainings. Once you have started the course, you may go on fire calls as an observer only, at the discretion of a department officer, and only with an officer or experienced and authorized firefighter.

Visit <http://training.nwcg.gov/courses/s190.html> to begin this training, and please direct any questions you have to a department officer.

Medical Response Training

You may begin serving on medical calls almost immediately, as long as you are accompanied by an officer or other authorized department member. You may NOT make any patient contact, unless specifically asked to do so by your on-scene supervisor. There are many tasks required on the scene of a medical response besides assisting the patient, such as traffic control, assisting with setting up a helicopter landing zone, gathering equipment and supplies, and so on, so we guarantee you will get plenty of experience even before you get any medical training.

The most basic level of training we require in order for you to make patient contact is the Emergency Medical Responder (formerly known as First Responder). We would also like to see you eventually become an EMT, or you may even skip EMR and go straight to EMT level. We cover all the costs of this training for you, and if you wish to seek a paid career in Fire and/or EMS, becoming an EMT is a huge step forward.

Both EMR and EMT are nationally accredited courses and managed under the National Registry of EMTs organization. Once you have completed the course and passed both a written test and a hands-on skills assessment lab, you receive your NREMT certification. With that, you can obtain a State license to practice as a medical responder. This certification is good for two years, and in order to maintain your certification, you must attend a certain number of Continuing Education classes every year. We provide these CE trainings for you, and there are many others all throughout the state going on all the time. They are free to attend, and are very beneficial to keeping your skills and knowledge sharp.

MCVFD is a Non-Transporting, Basic Life Support (BLS) agency. This means we do not practice Paramedic-level medicine, nor do we have the equipment to do so. We partner with Ute Pass Regional Ambulance District (UPRAD) to provide Advanced Life Support (ALS) services, and most of our medical calls will see UPRAD arriving on scene soon after us. We also deal with many medical helicopter flights since we are so far from any advanced trauma centers.

Training and Meeting Schedules

Every Thursday evening MCVFD hosts a meeting or training session. You will be required to attend a certain number of these meetings in order to pass from your initial probationary status.

The first Thursday of every month is the Fire District Board Meeting, followed by the Fire Department business meeting. Any department member may attend these meetings, but they are not meant for training purposes.

On the third Thursday of every month, we have Continuing Education medical training. These trainings are set up by the Penrose/St Francis Hospital EMS Education staff, and hosted at our main station in Westcreek. These classes count towards those with EMR or EMT certifications. Even if you do not have medical certification, these training sessions are VERY IMPORTANT to attend. Everyone will learn critical skills and assessment methods, and we get the opportunity to have case reviews of actual calls we have run on.

The remaining Thursdays are typically fire-related trainings. They cover operation of vehicles and equipment, wildland and structural firefighting training, drills and mock scenarios, case studies, and so on. Each Fire and Medical training you attend will award you credits, and the more you can attend, the better trained you will become and the more you will be allowed to do when on a call. Soon, there will come a point where we have full confidence in you, you have full confidence in yourself and you may be driving a vehicle to an incident and setting up command!

Once you have completed a certain number of training sessions, passed your probationary period, and begun the path towards fire or medical certifications, we will begin to issue you a department shirt, a pager, a radio, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). At this point, you will have become a full member of the department, and your name will appear on the roster.

We look forward to serving with you!

Gear Assignment

As you exit probation and move into your training, you will first be given a call sign – an MC-xx that will remain your identifying number. We use this in documentation such as incident reports, fire reports, patient care reports, and so on. We also address each other by this number during all radio communications – we never use someone’s name over the radio.

You will soon be given a “station” shirt with the department logo. This will identify you as a member of MCVFD, and should be worn when you are on a call, working around the station, attending meetings and trainings, or otherwise representing the department to the public. It should not be casually worn to a ball game or when out drinking with your buddies. When you wear it, you should consider yourself on duty, and act accordingly.

Next you will be given a pager that will be activated by Teller County Sheriff Dispatch whenever a 911 call is assigned to our department. It will emit a tone, followed by information about the incident, including the location and the nature of the call. This is your cue to respond to the station and report for service assignment.

You will also be assigned a portable VHF radio programmed with all the channels we use for department, dispatch, and countywide communications. You will be trained on radio use and protocols before assignment.

As you move through fire and medical training, you will be assigned further protective clothing, gear and tools. Any items provided to you remain the property of the department, and you are expected to keep them in good working order. Some items, such as structural firefighting gear, must be kept at the station but some items will be kept with you, such as wildland firefighting gear. Keep them safe and secure, and know they are only to be used while conducting department services.

Vehicle Training and Operation

As your training progresses, you will be given instruction on the use and operation of vehicles that you will be responding with. As you can imagine, all department vehicles are very expensive, potentially dangerous, and take a great deal of training to ensure the safe driving and operation of.

Distributed between the three stations of MCVFD are four brush trucks, three engines, two rescue vehicles, a water tender, and various other vehicles such as ATVs. Each vehicle has a separate training regimen, and we cover them in detail during our Thursday trainings. As you begin to feel comfortable with the operations, you will be given a one-on-one signoff session where you will be tested on all aspects of that vehicle's operation and use. It will be noted in your record that you have accomplished this, and you will then be authorized to respond to an incident using that vehicle.

Each vehicle differs by category, and within each category every vehicle is unique. While the basics are often very similar, the use of one brush truck's pump, for example, can be quite different from another's. Again, we train extensively with these vehicles, and we continually repeat the trainings as well. It takes a while to get used to a particular piece of equipment, and these refresher trainings are how we keep confident during stressful situations where you need to think quickly and clearly, and act decisively and with confidence.

We must note here that ANY abuse, misuse or unsafe operation of a vehicle is not only grounds for losing your authorization of that vehicle, but very likely grounds for complete dismissal from the department. We absolutely will not tolerate any misconduct in general, but especially with regards to vehicles and equipment.

Responding to Incidents

During your initial time with the department, when your pager goes off you should write down the information about the location and the emergency (keep a small notepad with you), and respond to the station calmly and safely to receive your assignment.

YOU MUST NOT VIOLATE ANY TRAFFIC RULES AND REGULATIONS. It can be difficult fighting the urge to rush to the station, but you cannot become another victim, or worse yet, cause someone else to become a victim. Any reports of unsafe driving when responding will result in disciplinary action or possible dismissal from the department.

Once you arrive at the station, check in with the highest-ranking person. You may be given one of several tasks, such as staying at the station and working dispatch. You may be asked to respond to the scene in a department vehicle, or even your own vehicle. You may even be asked to remain on stand-by. Understand that anything that is assigned to you is just as important as any other – it takes many people doing many different tasks to get the job done safely and efficiently. Do not feel like you were given a lesser task, especially at first. EVERY task is important, and you should perform the duty assigned to you to the best of your abilities.

As you spend time and gain experience with the department, you will be granted more and more autonomy. There may even come a time when you are on your own – the lone responder to an incident... but we certainly won't let that happen until we feel you are ready.

As always, the number one goal is your personal safety. If you are not comfortable with an assignment, or the scene doesn't seem safe, or you just don't feel ready for it, do not hesitate to speak up. Learning to remain calm and rely on your training is the only way to maintain safety for yourself, your teammates, and the public at large. As you master that, you will find your confidence level reaching higher and higher levels and your ability to manage very dangerous and stressful situations will amaze you.

Post-Incident Duties

When the call is over and the excitement is wearing off, remember that the work is not done...

After each call, we must inspect the vehicles, restock any used supplies, repair or replace damaged equipment, and do any number of things before the vehicle can be considered "back in service".

This can often be hard to do, especially after a long or difficult call, but we have to make sure we are ready for the next call, and that call can come at any time. Imagine if a brush truck wasn't resupplied with water and someone else responded to a fire in that vehicle, or a long-bone splint or trauma dressing wasn't restocked on a rescue vehicle.

A good deal of your training will focus on these sorts of tasks. Understand that this is the stuff that they don't show in the TV shows and the movies, but it is absolutely vital that this work is done. In all honesty, the time spent on a call is only a fraction of the total time you will spend as an emergency responder. We still find ways to make this work fun, work it into training exercises, and so on, but be aware that it exists, and you are expected to help with this type of work rather than just heading home right after the call.

We have the reports to write as well... many, many reports! We must document each call in multiple ways, and we must document every single action that was performed, by whom, and what the results of those actions were. These reports are legal documents, and can be called into court proceedings at any time as a record of what we did and/or didn't do, sometimes years down the road.

You should get in the habit very early on to keep your own notes of what you did while on calls (again, keep that little notepad handy). You can turn in those notes to the dispatcher or station officer, and they will include your notes in the final reports. You will get training on documentation, taking notes, writing reports, and every other aspect of keeping a fire department in top operational condition.

Station Work

As with post-incident duties, there is always plenty of work to be done around the station, and you are expected to take the time to contribute to these duties.

Keeping vehicles clean and presentable, sweeping out the vehicle bays, cleaning the bathrooms and kitchen, vacuuming and dusting... yep, just like at home. A clean and well-organized station is very important for many reasons.

We must make sure our backstock of medical supplies is up to date, go through storage and surplus gear to check for wear or damage, keep the office supplies in stock, keep the website up to date, look for grants and funding possibilities, find new training and education opportunities, get materials printed, and so on. It's almost an endless list of things to do and keep up with.

Overall, understand that this is very important and necessary work, and is just as much a part of being a member of a fire department as the actual fire and medical response. Do not be shy, roll up your sleeves, jump in and help make it happen.

All time spent with the department, on calls or otherwise, is recorded and becomes part of your record. If you decide you do want a paid career in the Fire or EMS world, be aware that having a fat column of station hours on your resumé is incredibly beneficial!

Doing the station work is also one of the best ways to gain a solid understanding of the entire operation. It helps you feel like a true part of something really important, and there are few things more honorable and rewarding than being a fully vested member of a volunteer fire department.

For those that are not able or interested in on-scene Fire or EMS duties, you can see there is still plenty of work to be done. We certainly welcome auxiliary folks as full members of the department as well.

In Conclusion

MCVFD has the honor of protecting 99 square miles of beautiful Colorado country within Douglas and Teller counties. Much of our work is within the Pike National Forest, and our coverage extends over an additional 100 square miles of no-man's land. We can always use another team member like you to help serve in this honor.

We hope this document has given you a good understanding of what the experience of becoming a volunteer firefighter entails. Hopefully you are now even more excited and committed in doing so.

We do not want to sugarcoat anything. It is tough, serious, mentally and physically demanding work. Many of the people you assist will be having the worst day of their lives. And there is a good deal of unglamorous, everyday work as well. It certainly isn't for everyone, but it will most likely be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences you have ever had. There is a special place in heaven for anyone doing volunteer work, but certainly none more special than that of a volunteer firefighter.

We will be with you every step of the way. We will never leave you alone, we will always stand by your side, and we will train you in every aspect you will need to feel safe and perform the duty of protecting life and property. We will make every effort to meet and exceed the effort you put into it, and as with all things in life, the more you put into it, the more you get out of it.

Please, take the time to really think this over. We fully understand that it is a big decision. Discuss it with your family and friends, talk to other members of the department, and you are always welcome to come sit in on a few meetings before you submit your application. Ask all the questions you can, and we will help you find the answers. Once you feel you are ready, we will welcome you to the family and start you on an amazing new chapter in your life.

From everyone here at Mountain Communities Volunteer Fire Department, we thank you for your interest, and we look forward to serving with you soon in protecting the life and property of this community.