

FACTS & FIGURES CONCERNING CAREER FIRE PROTECTION IN UNIONTOWN, AND OTHER MUNICIPALITIES IN PENNSYLVANIA

Classification of cities in Pennsylvania:

In 1895, when the number of residents in certain cities was growing rapidly, the state classified cities into four classes according to population. The following classifications, which still exist today, allow the General Assembly to pass laws for cities according to their population:

- First Class City -- 1 million or more
- Second Class City -- 500,000 - 999,999
- Second Class A City -- 100,000 - 499,999
- Third Class City - cities under 500,000 population that have not elected to become a city of the second class A.
- Note that many third class cities have lost population below 10,000 residents, but still retain their 3rd class city designation.

Philadelphia, the oldest and largest city in Pennsylvania, is the only first class city, and all laws pertaining to first class cities are for Philadelphia alone. Likewise, Pittsburgh is Pennsylvania's only second class city and Scranton is the only second class A city. In all three cities the elected mayor is the dominant force in government and has broad administrative, appointive and removal powers.

The 53 cities remaining are third class cities, a large number of which operate under a commission form of government. Under this system, the residents elect a mayor to serve as commission chairman and four other council members, with each heading one commission department. The mayor is the commissioner for public affairs and the council members head the commissions of public safety, accounts and finance, streets and public improvements and parks and public property.

Listing of Pennsylvania third class cities, and 2000 census population (rounded to nearest 10th)

A	F	O
Aliquippa 11,700	Farrell 6,050	Oil City 11,500
Allentown 106,600	Franklin 7,200	P
Altoona 49,500	G	Pittston 8,100
Arnold 5,700	Greensburg 15,800	Pottsville 15,500
B	H	R
Beaver Falls 9,900	Harrisburg 48,900	Reading 83,500
	Hazleton 23,300	S
	Hermitage 16,100	Shamokin 8,000

B

Bethlehem 71,300

Bradford 9,100

Butler 15,100

C

Carbondale 9,800

Chester 36,800

Clairton 8,400

Coatesville 10,800

Connellsville 9,100

Corry 6,800

D

DuBois 8,100

Duquesne 7,300

E

Erie 104,000

Easton 26,200

Sharon 16,300

J

Jeannette 10,600

Johnstown 23,900

L

Lancaster 55,300

Latrobe 7,900

Lebanon 24,400

Lock Haven 9,100

Lower Burrell 12,500

M

McKeesport 24,000

Meadville 13,600

Monessen 8,600

Monongahela 4,800

N

Nanticoke 10,900

New Castle 26,300

New Kensington 14,500

S

St. Marys 14,500

Sunbury 10,600

T

Titusville 6,100

U

Uniontown 12,400

W

Warren 10,200

Washington 15,200

Wilkes-Barre 43,100

Williamsport 30,700

Y

York 40,800

Of the 53 third class cities in Pennsylvania, only 8 do not have any type of paid fire protection. 46 do.

Of the 8 that do not have any paid personnel, one has a city wide volunteer fire chief who receives a part time salary/stipend (highlighted in green).

42 third class cities staff some type of paid fire personnel, either in the form of full time firefighters, part time firefighters, inspectors, paid chief officers, paid driver/operators, clerical, maintenance, or paid per call part time personnel. These are highlighted in **yellow**.

4 third class cities have a full time paid fire chief/fire official, but no other paid personnel. These are highlighted in **blue**.

The effects of Insurance Services Office (I.S.O.) Fire Service Rating Schedule (a.k.a. the “I.S.O. rating”):

Insurance Services Office grades fire departments for each municipality throughout the United States. Insurance companies then utilize the I.S.O. Public Protection Classification program to determine fire insurance rates for homeowners and commercial properties. The lower the number on the rating is, the more efficient fire protection is deemed to be, 10 being considered little to no protection, and 1 being considered exemplary. A lower I.S.O. rating can result in DRASTIC reductions in fire insurance rates. This will have a big impact on residential properties and an even bigger impact on commercial properties. For example, a municipality of a protection class 9 would expect to pay over 65% more than a municipality with a protection class 5! It is a safe estimate that most residents will save approximately \$200.00 with each point reduction in Uniontown’s I.S.O rating. Uniontown was previously rated at a class 5. Improvements were made since, and the last audit showed improvement to a class 4. HOWEVER, an internal audit was done and it was found the I.S.O. evaluator missed some items that would have made Uniontown’s improvement by two points, to a class 3. Also, since the last audit, additional equipment, including a higher aerial ladder truck, was added. The old ladder truck was kept as a reserve, but is frequently used, AND will grant even more credit for the department for having a second, fully equipped aerial ladder truck. In addition, more departmental training was scheduled, and each shift holds a brief training session each work day, adding even more credit to the rating! City fire officials are surely confident that a re-grading by I.S.O. will result in a class 3. There is a possibility of achieving a class 2, which might or might not be now, but is definitely possible in the near future.

The I.S.O. rating is based on a number of items. Equipment and manpower are some of the main items graded. Additionally training, communications equipment and dispatch, water supply, company distribution (which is distance between fire stations and certain apparatus to the municipal areas and borders), and now even hazard mitigation including inspection activities and code enforcement receive credit. Equipment evaluated includes pumping apparatus, aerial apparatus, portable equipment such as air masks, saws, salvage tarps, etc... A community the size of Uniontown, based on area, population, size of buildings, etc... would require a MINIMUM of 3 front line and one reserve pumper, and 1 front line ladder truck and one service/ladder truck as well. Additionally, the distribution of companies is evaluated as well, meaning the location and distance between fire stations and municipal boundaries. Uniontown currently operates out of two stations, which enables the department to receive maximum credit for company distribution. Without the East End station, this requirement would not be met.

Additionally, buildings with new or upgraded fire protection systems, including sprinklers, hose standpipes, and alarms receive more credit, both in the I.S.O. rating and on that particular property owner’s individual insurance rates as well. Uniontown has an aggressive inspection and code enforcement program, and as an “opt in” community under Pennsylvania’s Uniform Construction Code, does mostly everything “in house”. Uniontown fire personnel continually are involved in building plans review, inspections, and other code enforcement and hazard mitigation activities. I.S.O. takes all of this into consideration, and will rate a number of individual buildings within the city based on size and occupancy. Sprinklers, fire standpipes, alarms, and hazard mitigation will be factored into ratings.

Manpower on alarms receives credit. Uniontown is a “combination” department, meaning there are both full time paid (career), and non-salaried on call (volunteer) members. While Uniontown both relies on and appreciates its volunteer members very much, there is no guarantee as to how many members will be available to respond to alarms. Additionally, during daytime hours, when most personnel are at work, there may be no one available. The commonwealth of Pennsylvania is losing volunteer fire personnel at an alarming rate. Where there were once over 200,000 fire personnel thirty years ago, now the state has roughly 70,000. Additionally, since Uniontown’s fire department has full time personnel, it would be responsible to adhere to the standards set forth for career fire departments, such as National Fire Protection Association’s (N.F.P.A.) standard # 1710. N.F.P.A. # 1710 requires a minimum of 4 personnel, and enforces the “two in-two out” standard. With all of these facts stated, to receive the maximum credit for manpower under I.S.O.’s criterion, the current complement of paid personnel within the Uniontown Fire Bureau would have to be maintained *AT A MINIMUM!*

Currently, Uniontown has the best I.S.O. rating within the county, and only one department in the area (Mt Lebanon, Allegheny County) has a better rating. Their rating is currently at 3, which Uniontown’s should have been, but was graded at 4 by mistake. Mt Lebanon is comparable in size and structure to Uniontown, except it has a slightly higher population, and a larger career staff within the fire department.

In Uniontown, it costs each household just a little over \$180.00 from their taxes to maintain its current level of fire protection. Uniontown has improved its I.S.O. rating by a point from the previous rating, and is expected to improve again by at least another point. \$180.00 out of a homeowner’s tax millage is “cheap insurance” compared to what they would pay in fire insurance rates if the I.S.O. rating would become worse! Roughly 50 cents a day is a small price to pay for quality protection!

Full time, career personnel in Uniontown make up the manpower requirement, conduct inspections and other hazard mitigation activities, inspect and maintain equipment, and train each shift. These all factor in heavily on I.S.O.’s grading. Without the current number of full time paid personnel, the I.S.O. rating would be affected in a negative manner, and very drastically!

Recommendations of the International City Manager’s Association:

Concerning staffing of full time firefighters, the I.C.M.A. has suggested *A MINIMUM* of 1 full time firefighter per 1,000 residents for cities over 10,000 population, and also strongly recommends the same standard for cities and towns of 5,000 to below 10,000 residents. The city of Uniontown as of the last census had a population of roughly 12,400 residents, and a daytime population of 18,600 counting workers and commuters.

Staffing levels:

Staffing levels of third class cities that *currently meet, at a minimum, or exceed* the I.C.M.A. suggestion, N.F.P.A. # 1710 standard, and I.S.O.’s criterion for manpower:

Allentown: population of 106,600, daytime population of 118,800, 141 career fire personnel.

Altoona: population of 49,500, daytime population of 57,800, 70 career fire personnel.

Bethlehem: population of 71,300, daytime population of 73,600, 112 career fire personnel.

Bradford: population of 9,100, daytime population of 11,100, 20 career fire personnel.

Butler: population of 15,100, daytime population of 17,850, 21 career fire personnel.
 Chester: population of 36,800, daytime population of 34,500, 61 career fire personnel.
 Coatesville: population of 10,800, daytime population of 9,000, 16 career fire personnel.
 Corry: population of 6,800, daytime population of 9,000, 10 career fire personnel.
 Erie: population of 104,000, daytime population of 117,000, 147 career fire personnel.
 Easton: population of 26,200, daytime population of 25,800, 44 career fire personnel.
 Farrell: Population of 6,050, daytime population of 5,500, 16 total paid personnel, w/ full & part time.
 Harrisburg: population of 48,900, daytime population of 81,500, 100 career fire personnel.
 Jeanette: population of 10,600, 24 total paid personnel w/ full & part time.
 Johnstown: population of 23,900, daytime population of 34,100, 43 career fire personnel.
 Lancaster: population of 55,900, daytime population of 73,400, 84 career fire personnel.
 Meadville: population of 13,600, daytime population of 20,000, 16 career fire personnel.
 Nanticoke: population of 10,900, daytime population of 9,400, 12 career fire personnel.
 Oil City: population of 11,500, daytime population of 12,100, 16 career fire personnel.
 Reading: population of 83,500, daytime population of 94,000, 147 career fire personnel.
 Sharon: population of 16,300, daytime population of 17,800, 19 career fire personnel.
 Titusville: population of 6,100, daytime population of 7,300, 7 career fire personnel, plus 9 paid on call.
 Uniontown: population of 12,400, daytime population of 18,600, 13 career fire personnel.
 Warren: population of 10,200, daytime population of 15,200, 24 career fire personnel.
 Washington: population of 15,200, daytime population of 22,500, 20 career fire personnel.
 Wilkes Barre, population of 42,000, daytime population of 54,200, 88 career fire personnel.
 Williamsport: population of 30,700, daytime population of 43,000, 33 career fire personnel.
 York: population of 40,800, daytime population of 52,100, 75 career fire personnel.

- Note that while the cities of Meadville, Uniontown, Washington, and Williamsport meet the 1 firefighter per 1,000 residents standard for full time residents, they fall short for daytime population.

Staffing levels of third class cities that *currently come close* (but do not meet) to meeting the full time population staffing standards per I.C.M.A. suggestion, N.F.P.A. # 1710 standard, and I.S.O.'s criterion for manpower:

Aliquippa: population of 11,700, 9 career fire personnel.
 Beaver Falls: population of 9,900, 8 career fire personnel.
 Carbondale: population of 9,800, 8 career fire personnel.
 Franklin: population of 7,200, 7 career fire personnel, plus 6 paid on call.
 Hazleton: population of 23,300, 18 career fire personnel.
 Lock Haven: population 9,100, 9 career fire personnel.
 Lebanon: population 24,400, 19 career fire personnel.
 McKeesport: population of 24,000, 23 career fire personnel.
 Pittston: population of 8,100, 7 career fire personnel.

Staffing levels of the remaining third class cities *do not even come close* to meeting the full time population staffing standard per I.C.M.A. suggestion, N.F.P.A. # 1710 standard, and I.S.O.'s criterion for manpower!

While some departments have a large number of volunteers, they are truly the exception, and not the norm! Again, volunteer ranks are dwindling at an alarming rate, and the majority of fire companies are

taking in very few new members. Retaining old members is also an issue. Along with this, so much is “competing” for a volunteer firefighter’s time, including work, family, and other organizations. While volunteers are an asset, they are not GUARANTEED staffing like career personnel are.

Some departments, such as Greensburg, must maintain multiple fire stations and companies to meet company distribution and manpower requirements. Greensburg, for example, has 7 fire stations.

Combination departments are a good option for cities, boroughs, and townships of moderate size, up to 30,000 to 50,000 residents. HOWEVER, for it to truly work, there must be *guaranteed* staffing on the career side to meet manpower requirements, N.F.P.A. # 1710 standards, “two in-two out” and other safety standards and rules, etc...

A good example of an efficiently run combination department is the Municipality of Mt Lebanon. With 17 full time career, and 40 volunteer fire personnel, they safely and efficiently meet all standards set forth by I.S.O. and N.F.P.A. # 1710. The department also offers incentives to retain volunteer members as well, although it does NOT use volunteer manpower to substitute for career staffing. Mt Lebanon is a full service department, offering fire suppression, first responder, hazard mitigation, rescue services, inspections, and public fire education. Because of the career staffing and all the duties they perform, it has truly helped their I.S.O. rating as well. Theirs is the best in Allegheny County at a 3.

The argument of Uniontown being a combination department versus a fully paid department, and that volunteer manpower counts cannot be used. Career staffing is GUARANTEED staffing. Additionally, many combination departments are staffing adequate career personnel to meet the manpower standards, and volunteer turnout is an added bonus. Examples are the cities of York, Williamsport, Harrisburg, and a number of other smaller cities, boroughs of Chambersburg, Dunmore, Kingston, and several smaller boroughs, the municipality of Mt Lebanon, and the townships of Manchester, Springettsbury, and a few others.

Municipalities other than cities with career fire personnel: It should be noted that a number of boroughs and townships meet the recommended staffing levels per I.C.M.A., N.F.P.A. standard # 1710, and I.S.O. manpower requirement. Some examples of which are: Chambersburg – population 16,600 – 18 career personnel, Edgewood – population 3,400 – 4 career personnel, Greenville – population 6,400 – 7 career personnel, Midway – 1,100 population – 2 career personnel, Swissvale – population 9,700 – 12 career personnel, and Wilkinsburg – population 17,600 – 22 career personnel.

- Currently, 117 municipalities in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania provide some sort of paid fire protection, at levels ranging from one paid person to fully paid departments.

Effects of the loss of career personnel in nearby municipalities:

In the 1980’s, an area of Allegheny County, known as the Rust Belt, lost a number of career and combination fire departments. The cities of Clairton and Duquesne, both with full career departments, were reduced to volunteer departments with only a paid chief. The boroughs of Braddock, Homestead, McKees Rocks, and Carnegie were eventually reduced to all volunteer departments. The borough of North Braddock, once a combination fire department, was reduced to an all volunteer force as well. Since then, a number of negative occurrences have taken place. Buildings have become blighted, something that could have possibly been stopped by getting involved in inspections and code

enforcement. The problem involving doing inspections though, would be; without the career personnel, who would have the time and ability to do it? Blight and urban decay have taken over the areas, and along with it came increases in arson. Now, responses were not as fast without the paid personnel, and many times manpower was not adequate, and additional help was needed from several neighboring departments. This too caused a delay in getting adequate manpower to the scene a lot of times.

Not to belittle or downgrade the efforts of the volunteers. Theirs is a noble organization indeed. But, the facts speak for themselves. Delayed responses, unpredictable manpower, and at times inadequate manpower are all problems that could have been solved by at least keeping some of the paid personnel! Granted, a lot of these municipalities could barely afford to do it. But then again, saving property and rehabilitating properties does help preserve the tax base, and even increase it.

In addition, with the loss of guaranteed staffing, loss of some of the equipment, loss of inspection activities, loss of equipment maintenance, loss of trained personnel, etc... this had to surely affect these municipalities' I.S.O. ratings. At this time, the cities of Clairton and Duquesne maintain a class 5 rating. This is definitely a respectable rating, one of a bit better than average. However, with paid personnel and all they could be doing, it would definitely improve their rating by a point or more. The boroughs of Braddock, Carnegie, and McKees Rocks currently earned a rating of 6, which is on the low end of average, and Homestead earned a 7, which is well below average. Again, paid personnel and the duties they could be performing would greatly improve these municipalities ratings as well. This would save possibly hundreds of dollars in fire insurance rates. *Even if the municipality would have to raise it's millage rate, the savings in fire insurance rates due to a better I.S.O. rating would probably at least make up for the loss of money due to increased tax millage, if not possibly make the property owner/tax payer come out ahead!*

Hazards and special needs within the community:

The city of Uniontown has a number of special needs occupancies within the city that could require a lot of resources in the event of an emergency. There are 15 high rise or mid rise buildings in the city, some over a dozen floors. The highest being the courthouse tower at 188 feet, and Fayette Holdings at 149 feet tall. In addition, there are roughly 40 buildings total that are 3 floors or greater within the city. The city is home to a number of elderly apartments. Additionally, the city has a number of smaller personal care homes, and a larger skilled nursing facility, not to mention the hospital also. We also have 7 schools within the city limits, along with an adult business college and a branch campus of a community college. There are a number of assembly occupancies in the city, the largest being the State Theater. The city is also home to a number of business and mercantile occupancies, restaurants, office buildings, and even has some manufactory occupancies, one of the more sizable being United/Fike's Dairy. There are several large area buildings as well as high buildings, and these present special hazards to fire personnel in the event of a fire. Finally, there are 6,320 housing units within the city.

The services a career department can offer residents of Uniontown:

As stated earlier, there is a vast array of services the career (paid) personnel within the city's fire bureau can offer residents. Ones that many do not even know exist. Aside from fire suppression activities, crews also provide rescue services in a number of different aspects of rescue. Hazard mitigation is also performed. As is emergency management type functions, in which career personnel work along side volunteer members and E.M.A. personnel in times of floods, severe weather, and natural or man made disasters. Career personnel are the first responders to hazardous materials

incidents. Though some will require assistance from city E.M.A personnel and the county Haz Mat team, many can be contained and handled just by the responding on duty fire crew.

Paid personnel in the fire bureau all have medical training, at a minimum of PA First Responder, with many as E.M.T., and two certified as Paramedics. A city fire engine has received designation from the PA Department of Health as a certified first responder unit.

A very important function performed by some career personnel is inspections and code enforcement. Career fire bureau members are involved in building plans review, testing and inspecting fire protection systems including alarms and sprinklers, on site inspections at construction sites, occupancy inspections, annual compliance inspections, and courtesy safety inspections as well.

Paid personnel also conduct community safety training, and public fire education programs. Personnel present programs to school age children in a regular basis, and frequently conduct tours of the fire station as well. Personnel also speak to adult groups such as civic groups about fire prevention. Training of staff members of personal care homes, social workers, and other types of workers is also conducted by the career personnel. This includes fire extinguisher and evacuation training. The department also offers a Juvenile Firesetter Intervention program.

Career personnel have obtained a number of training classes and professional qualifications board certifications in all aspects of firefighting, rescue, apparatus operations, and other emergency service training. Additionally, 2 career personnel are accredited and certified as instructors through the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy, and 5 are certified as professional qualifications certification evaluators.

While the volunteer personnel are a much needed, and appreciated part of the city's fire department, it should be clear to see the importance of having the current level of paid personnel as well.

On a final note: With the decrease in available volunteers, the problems with recruiting and retaining volunteer members, and the increased demand for full service fire departments, many small boroughs and townships across the state are now putting on paid personnel when their municipality had none prior. Others are increasing the number of paid personnel to departments that had a small, "skeleton crew" of paid members. While any are developing into growing and prosperous areas, others are just small towns looking to protect their citizens. Midway borough in Washington County is a good example. A borough of just around 1,000 residents employs daytime firefighters/EMTs. Therefore, it would be quite foolish for a city the size of Uniontown to decrease it's number of existing paid personnel! With a department who offers not only fire suppression, but also rescue, first responder EMS, code enforcement, inspections, and public fire education, Uniontown has a busy fire department, and the need to keep the current staffing should be evident!