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Barn consumed by fire a “total loss”

Fire department to discuss response problems at two May meetings

Two fires in one week have shown how the Key Peninsula Fire Department is struggling to adequately respond to fire emergencies. The Board of Fire Commissioners will hold two meetings in May to discuss options for increasing the number of full-time fire fighters it employs and reducing response times. The public is encouraged to attend.

Sunday, April 22nd, it took 25 minutes for enough emergency personnel to reach the scene and effectively extinguish the fire at the Old Glencove Hotel. The three-alarm blaze required assistance from neighboring districts because the Key Peninsula Fire Department was unable to raise enough fire fighters to respond.

On Tuesday, April 25th at 12:06 p.m., the Key Peninsula Fire Department received a call about a structural fire in a barn. Two fire fighters were on scene at 12:12 p.m. But, it took 10 more minutes before enough personnel had arrived to effectively fight the blaze, at which point the wooden structure was consumed. A woodstove is thought to be the cause of the fire, but the Fire Marshall’s report is still pending.

The National Fire Protection Association says that fire districts with similar populations should be able to respond to a fire or emergency medical call within five minutes 90% of the time. Because of staffing shortages, the Key Peninsula Fire Department failed to meet this basic standard 85% of the time for fires and almost 92% of the time for medical calls in 2011.

“Here are two fires in one week where we have struggled to get enough fire fighters on scene,” said Fire Chief Tom Lique. “I can’t say it enough times: this is a serious public safety issue.”

Two on-duty fire fighters were on a medical call, which delayed the fire department’s ability to respond. Chief Lique said that he was thankful no people were inside the barn, which stored farm machinery and equipment. Fire departments require four fire fighters to be on scene for safety reasons before interior search and rescue operations can take place.

“No people were inside, but the structure and its contents are considered a total loss,” he said.

The Key Peninsula Fire Department has the fifth highest property loss record for fires in Pierce County because of its lack of emergency personnel and long response times. The Board of Fire Commissioners is considering asking voters to approve a levy on the November election ballot to fund eight full-time fire fighter positions. The levy would cost the owner of a \$225,000 home an additional \$7.70 per month. Better response times are the key to saving lives and property, as well as reducing homeowner insurance premiums, medical and ambulance fees.

The public is invited to participate in the discussion at two meetings in May. The meetings will be held on May 8th and May 22nd at 6:00 p.m. at the Key Center Fire Station, 8911 Key Peninsula Highway North (KPN), in Lakebay.

The Key Peninsula Fire Department serves 17,000 people over 65 square miles. For more information about the department, visit www.keypeninsulafire.org.

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