

# AVFD, a small district with a big impact

BY LIZA CROSSE

Recently I spoke with McKenzie Turnbull, logistics chief for the Applegate Valley Fire District (AVFD), who is in charge of all vehicles, facilities, and small equipment. My goal was to learn about AVFD's material resources and how they have evolved to improve safety. In part, my purpose was to understand how our tax dollars are spent. I'm happy to report that I came away feeling that AVFD's resources are wisely used. I was also impressed by the range of modern tools available for emergency responders' use, as well as the professional standards upheld by McKenzie and others.

**Big trucks.** Type 1 trucks are big and fast and sometimes red, and AVFD has eight of them, as well as another 20 smaller trucks and tenders. Fire trucks come in a range of FEMA-designated types—Type 1 is the leading structure-fire response truck. Costing up to \$1 million when new, AVFD purchases used Type 1s for around \$40,000, and it is McKenzie's job to keep them in prime working order. Type 1s are spread across AVFD's seven stations, along with various smaller, more maneuverable trucks suited for brush fires or medical response, and water tenders.

**Fire-rated pumps.** To fight a structure fire, a pump needs to produce at least 1,000 gallons per minute at 150 pounds per square inch. In a Type 1 truck, that

requires the engine to run as if it were traveling 55 mph! At a recent local house fire, water had to be pushed uphill 800 feet to reach the house, while still maintaining sufficient pressure to effectively fight the fire.

Having a combination of strategically placed stations, firefighting vehicles, and modern pumps results in a better ISO (Insurance Services Office) rating. This often results in lower insurance costs for property owners in Applegate Valley. All equipment at fully staffed stations receives daily inspections to ensure everything is in tip-top condition and ready to go. Volunteer stations receive monthly inspections.

**Safety Equipment.** Fire-resistant suits ("turnouts") and helmets have improved greatly over time to include built-in goggles and much more. One of the more amazing pieces of equipment is the Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), typically costing \$5,000 each. AVFD has a good track record of getting grant funds to purchase SCBAs and other equipment. Firefighters suffer from a high incidence of cancers from their exposure to toxic smoke, and the SCBA is a comprehensive system that is fire-resistant to 300 degrees, which enables firefighters to fight fires more safely. In addition to a breathing apparatus, the SCBA has internal LED



Logistics Chief McKenzie Turnbull with a Type 1 fire engine. Photo: Liza Crosse.

gauge lights visible to the firefighter, alarms for when air or batteries are low, and an alarm that goes off if a firefighter stops moving. There is also a thermal imager so that firefighters can see people who may be collapsed in a dark or smokey room. SCBAs can "buddy breathe" with other firefighters or a person trapped in a smoky place. All functions have mechanical backups in case of battery failure.

**Medical Equipment.** Because 60 percent of AVFD's calls are medical emergencies, all vehicles carry a comprehensive array of medical equipment. One of the biggest improvements has come in extrication equipment, formerly known as the "jaws of life." Modern extrication equipment is battery-operated, does not require a hydraulic pump and hoses, and is much lighter than older tools. This enables emergency responders to quickly help people in difficult places, such as a car that has rolled down an embankment.

**Communications.** In the big picture, a comprehensive, countywide upgrade to the emergency radio system, led by Emergency Communications of Southern Oregon, will provide new radio towers to enable emergency communications in many places in the Applegate Valley where cell phones don't work. You may have seen the new tower at AVFD's Station 54 on Water Gap Road. On the ground, specialized apps, such as PulsePoint and First Due, provide emergency responders with information and maps to an incident. They can also update others about the status of an incident. In combination

with radio dispatch, information about a patient's condition can be shared with hospitals for optimal treatment.

McKenzie says that readiness is his job. Beside him stands a team of people, from board members to student firefighters, all dedicated to preparedness. Thank you, Applegate Valley Fire District!

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## Upcoming AVFD events

**Coffee with the Chief, 9 am June 12.** Chief Wolfard will update community members about news and recent events at the Applegate Valley Fire District (AVFD). This is a great opportunity to ask questions and learn more about your local fire district! AVFD Training Room, 1095 Upper Applegate Road, Ruch.

**Spaghetti Dinner! 5-7 pm June 20.** Babette's homemade sauce! Just \$5. Hosted by the Friends of the Applegate Fire District. Have fun with other community members while supporting AVFD. AVFD Training Room, 1095 Upper Applegate Road, Ruch.

**Save the date. Special fundraiser and pig roast! September 20.** Sponsored by Friends of the Applegate Fire District. Details to be announced.

Photos, below left: A pump panel on a Type 1 fire engine. Below right: Firefighter Carter McDougall in full turnout and SCBA. Photos: Liza Crosse.



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