



Benton County Fire Protection District No. 4

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Fire District 4 faces rising costs and challenges

Inflation and levy compression strain resources as district plans for future

WEST RICHLAND, Wash. – Benton County Fire District 4 serves approximately 25,000 residents across 52 square miles, including the city of West Richland. In 2024, firefighters and paramedics responded to nearly 2,300 emergency calls, with 67% related to emergency medical services (EMS).

While call volumes have remained steady, the cost of providing emergency services has climbed significantly. The district is now dealing with sharp increases across several areas: 911 dispatch services are up 78%, fuel costs have risen 92%, and technology expenses have nearly doubled since the district's last voter-approved funding increase.

Fire District 4 is funded through two voter approved property tax levies – a fire levy and an EMS levy. Over time, these levy rates fall as property values rise, limiting revenue growth. This effect, known as “levy compression,” makes it harder for the district to keep pace with growing operational costs.

Fire District 4 has not asked voters for a levy increase in the past three years, thanks to careful budgeting and strong community support. This approach has allowed the district to maintain service levels and move forward with several key projects to improve emergency response. Still, the cost of delivering emergency services continues to rise each year, placing increasing pressure on the district's limited budget.

“We’re working hard to stretch every taxpayer dollar, but we’ll soon face some tough choices,” said Fire Chief Paul Carlyle. “We want to be transparent with our community and involve them in the conversation.”

Fire District 4 will continue to evaluate its financial outlook and engage with residents as it plans for the future of emergency services.

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Benton County Fire District 4 provides fire and emergency medical service to approximately 20,000 people over 52 square miles. While the service area includes the city of West Richland and its immediate unincorporated areas, BCFD4 is a separate taxing district. BCFD4 firefighters, emergency medical

technicians, and paramedics respond to an average of 2,200 calls annually, over two-thirds of which are EMS-related. More information available at www.bcf4.org.