



## Extinguishing the Rumors Prepared by the Yarnell Fire District

### How to get Information about the Fire District

The public is welcome and encouraged to attend Fire District Board Meetings. Unfortunately, due to Open Meeting Laws, the Board is unable to answer questions from the public at Board Meetings unless the questions are directly related to an item on the agenda. However, members of the public may ask questions of individual Board Members either after meetings or by calling or writing Board Members. In addition, members of the public may submit written questions to the Board by completing the attached form (also available at Board Meetings).

### Recent Questions from the Public

Below are some of the questions received from the public during the past three months and the answers that were provided by the staff.

1. **I've heard that Yarnell doesn't have any fire fighters and that we no longer have emergency medical service available in the community.**

This statement is **NOT true!** Yarnell has **three** EMT's and Peeples Valley has **three** EMT's who respond to medical emergencies. Yarnell has eight trained fire fighters, four of whom are Wildland Fire certified and one of whom holds certification as a Fire Fighter I/II – the highest level of training ever achieved by a member of the Yarnell Fire Department. Yarnell also has five reserve personnel; two of these are EMT's and three of these hold Wildland and Fire Fighter I/II certifications. It **is** true that neither Yarnell nor Peeples Valley has a Paramedic; neither community has **ever** had a Paramedic.

2. **Does the Department train it's members?**

Training is held every two weeks; the schedule, including the subject to be covered at each training session, is posted at the firehouse. In addition, several staff members have taken specialized training, outside the District, in a variety of subjects including (but not limited to) Emergency Medical Technician (a one semester class), Fire Fighter I/II (several semesters of coursework), Wildland Fire, Explosives, Hydraulics, Air Operations, Propane Fires, Emergency Scene Management, and Hazardous Materials.

3. **I saw someone driving one of the fire trucks recently; he stalled the truck and didn't seem to be able to drive it – what if there is a fire – will he be able to drive?**

The incident described above occurred when one of the firemen was being trained to drive a fire truck he had not previously driven and when you observed him he had not yet mastered driving the truck. This is what training is all about ... giving people an opportunity to learn by doing – **before** an emergency.

**4. I heard that Yarnell personnel go to Peeples Valley to answer emergency medical and fire calls and I heard that there have been times when people in Yarnell needed help and couldn't get it because all Yarnell personnel were in Peeples Valley.**

There has **never** been an occasion when a person in Yarnell needed assistance and didn't receive it because Yarnell personnel were in Peeples Valley.

However, it is indeed true that Yarnell assists Peeples Valley under a Mutual aid agreement – and Peeples Valley assists Yarnell. (For more information see the February 7, 2002 issue of *The Yellow Sheet*). On the very rare occasions when all Yarnell EMT's are out of town, medical coverage is provided to Yarnell by Peeples Valley (aren't we **fortunate!!**) and, of course, on the rare occasions when all Peeples Valley EMT's are out of town Yarnell provides medical coverage to Peeples Valley. In addition, the two departments **automatically** assist one another on **all** fire calls.

On extremely rare occasions there have been two back-to-back or close to simultaneous calls in the Yarnell/Peeples Valley area. A review of the incident reports for the year found no occasions where there were **more** than two calls within a four hour time frame. Early in 2002 there was a call at the Mountaineer Mini-Mart (a Peeples Valley call that required assistance from Yarnell) and, just as that call was being completed, a call came from Yarnell. The Yarnell EMT staff were already away from their homes and therefore response time was not delayed; in fact, the Sheriff was at the Mountaineer and notified the staff that he had been called to investigate a scene and would probably need an EMT ... by the time the 911 call came, one EMT was already in Yarnell approaching the scene. The only other 'back to back' call in the last six months was a call at Oak Park in Yarnell followed by a request to assist Wickenburg Ambulance at Lea Way's office. The assistance needed was for helicopter control, not medical assistance.

**5. Why does the Fire District use taxpayer money to hire attorneys when the County Attorney is available free of charge.**

Although the County Attorney is legally **allowed** to advise the District free of charge, in actual practice the County Attorney rarely represents **any** Fire Districts in legal disputes that do not directly affect the County and never represents Districts in contractual matters (such as the Life Teen Contract). This means that the District **must** hire private counsel for these legal matters and Fire Districts are specifically authorized by statute to hire private counsel for legal advice.

**6. I heard that the Chief uses a Fire Department vehicle for personal errands (grocery shopping, etc.)**

The Board has authorized the Chief's use of the Utility Vehicle to attend fire fighting classes at Yavapai Community College and to stop enroute to or from classes for personal needs. This minimizes the amount of time that the Chief must be out of the area; otherwise, the Chief would have to go back to Prescott for personal matters. The Board feels that reducing the amount of time the Chief must be out of the area is good for the community. (You may be interested to know that District taxpayers did not pay tuition for any of the Chief's coursework at YCC.)

**7. I heard that the Chief is paid a salary and that other volunteers receive stipends. I thought we had a volunteer fire department?**

Yes, the Chief is paid a salary. The Arizona Fire Districts Association (AFDA) recommends that volunteer fire departments pay the Chief a salary, and many volunteer departments pay an administrative assistant as well. Emergency services are vital in the rural community, yet there is a general trend away from volunteering due to two wage earners in many households, etc.; paying a minimal salary is often the only way that a small rural community can have a Fire Chief able to devote the **time** necessary to run the department effectively. The Yarnell Fire District spends less than 11% of its budget on salaries, as compared to many other volunteer districts that spend upward of 40% of the budget on salaries. The Yarnell [Volunteer] Public Library has paid the Library Manager since about 1995 and at the present time 47% of the dollars allocated by the County to the Library are spent on the Manager's salary. Volunteer fire fighters and EMT's are paid a stipend of \$10.00 per call to reimburse them for gas, clothing that is ruined at a scene, laundering clothing following scenes, etc.

**8. I heard that a member of the Yarnell Fire District Board is on the Peoples Valley Fire Department; isn't that illegal?**

No, Board member service on a neighboring fire department is not illegal. Board members can not be members of the Department **in their own District** – the basic reason for this is that it is hard to be both the Chief's boss and his subordinate at the same time (this is called a conflict of interest). However, if a Yarnell District Board member serves the Peoples Valley Department, under the direction of the Peoples Valley Fire Chief, this conflict does not exist. In fact, the Board's attorney and insurance agent **recommend** that Board Members in small rural fire districts join neighboring departments if there is a mutual aid agreement so that the number of available volunteers can be as large as possible. One of Yarnell's Board members is a member of the Peoples Valley fire department and as such can respond to Yarnell calls **when mutual aid is requested by Yarnell**.

**9. Why is the District spending my tax money to send the Chief to an "Investigating Causes of Fires" class when the State provides free fire cause investigation?**

While it is true that the State Fire Marshall's Office will investigate fires in our District free of charge, the Fire Marshall's Office is severely understaffed and recently had five more employees cut from their budget. During the best of times there is a **minimum** 24 hours before an investigator can be in Yarnell, and generally the wait is much longer. Fire scenes change quickly and investigation delays may mean that the cause of a fire can never be determined. The State Fire Marshall's Office **strongly recommends** that Districts have someone trained in investigation so that this service can be provided locally. Furthermore, **FEMA** believes this is so important for the Yarnell Community that it is paying for tuition, transportation to the east coast (!), and housing; the only cost to the Yarnell District is \$140.00 to cover the cost of meals for the two-week course.

**10. How much does the Repeater [communications receiver/transmitter] cost the Fire District?**

The Fire District assisted its communications contractor in obtaining zoning approval to erect a new communications shed when he was denied access to the existing communications tower; as a result, there are no costs associated with using the communications repeater.

**11. I heard that it costs \$20,000 to equip a Paramedic and that there are increased insurance costs to cover malpractice suits.**

The cost to the taxpayer to equip a Paramedic is \$10,000 to \$20,000 depending on the quality of the equipment and no one other than a Paramedic can use this equipment; in addition, it costs the District approximately \$3000 in tax payer dollars to train a Paramedic. And yes, insurance costs increase due to increased exposure to malpractice suits. The District's Medical Direction at Del Webb Hospital is also concerned about increased costs associated with malpractice. Before our Medical Direction will allow us to hire a Paramedic they require the candidate to take additional training under their direction and control – and if they wish they can refuse to allow us to hire.

**12. Does the Board have a three to five year plan?**

The Board is working on developing a 3-5 year planning cycle. Budget planning is just about under control and a three to five year plan should follow. The budget history below illustrates the need for planning and the current Board believes that a good budget planning process has been developed and taxpayers should no longer see the major fluctuations in tax rates that have been experienced in the past.

Recent budget history : in 1998/99 the tax rate was \$0.92 which was insufficient to run the District. In fact, the District had been using savings to meet the District's needs. In 1999/00 the tax rate was raised to \$2.12 based on the then Chief's desired budget. In 2000/01 taxes were lowered to \$0.98 based on the then Board's commitment made to the public when there were complaints about the increase that more than doubled the tax rate. However, the \$ 0.98 was insufficient to meet the District needs. In 2001/02 the rates were raised to \$ 1.75 based on a thorough review of the budgetary needs as seen over the prior four years. Note that the **AVERAGE** tax rate for the 16 Fire Districts in Yavapai County was **\$2.0398** in 2001/02. The Board is currently finalizing the 2002-2003 budget and does not expect to raise tax rates; however, note that property valuations have gone up which will mean that the actual dollars paid to the District will increase. Finally, note that there is a cap on the tax rate that can be set by the District of \$3.00; four of the 16 Fire Districts in Yavapai County set their rates at the \$3.00 cap in 2001-2002.