

## News From The Ellsburg Volunteer Fire Department 20181205

Our December meeting was held on December 5, 2018, at 6:30 pm at the Bass Lake Firehall. Our January meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 2, at 6:30pm at our Bass Lake Firehall on Mink Road. We are happy to report that we received the washer - extractor grant from the state fire marshal division. This is a front-loader washer that uses a very high speed spin cycle to extract the water from the fabric. Fires, especially structure fires, release many carcinogens that become imbedded in a firefighter's turn-out gear. Blood and body fluids at an accident scene can also end up on that gear. These contaminants can expose a firefighter and anything his gear touches to deadly diseases. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) provides guidelines for keeping firefighters safe. They recommend washing gear that has been exposed to fire or body fluids immediately. They also warn against washing gear in homes because of the risk of cross-contamination. Home washing machines cannot remove the contaminants and biohazards while preserving the fabric integrity the way that a washer extractor can. This can mean that the next load of laundry that is washed in that home washer can be exposed to these contaminants. For years, firefighters did not clean their gear regularly. Wearing soiled gear was considered a badge of bravery and toughness. Actually, cancer is now the leading cause of death in firefighters. It is believed that exposure to carcinogens on dirty gear is a key factor in this. On July 7, 2018, the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act was signed and became law. This bill requires the CDC to maintain a registry of firefighters to collect information and monitor the incidence of cancer among firefighters. This is an important safety concern for every fire department. Washer-extractors are expensive. The one our department will get can wash two sets of turn-out gear at a time. The cost of this machine is \$7000. Full time fire departments require much larger machines. Our department will share this machine with the Cotton VFD. It will be housed at our Bass Lake Firehall because the water supply and electricity requirements are already there.

Our department has also applied for a FEMA grant that would help us to purchase a second set of turn-out gear and SCBA's for our firefighters. A second set of gear is necessary now. While one set is washing and drying, a firefighter needs another set available to respond to an emergency. We have not heard yet if this grant has been awarded. FEMA has had a busy year with hurricanes, wildfires, and flooding emergencies. We will keep our fingers crossed and hope that there is some money left over for us.

Lee Leighton, our frequent benefactor, has given our department another gift! Lee had a map made of Ellsburg Township that includes all addresses as well as their GPS coordinates. It is a large and beautiful map. We have it hanging in our meeting room at our Bass Lake Firehall. We will add a few more GPS coordinates of air medical landing zones. Thank-you so much, Lee, for this wonderful map! It is very useful for our department.

We responded to a vehicle rollover on Highway 53. The first of this winter season! And where do you think it happened? Between mile marker 43 and 44 of course! That section of 53 is notorious for grabbing vehicles and sending them out of control. Please be careful here! Please warn your young drivers about this hazardous area. In this case, a 21yo was traveling southbound on 53, slid into the median, became airborne, and landed on the roof of the vehicle in the northbound lane. Luckily, she was wearing her seatbelt and sustained minor injuries. Seatbelts do work! Always wear them! Her seatbelt kept her in her car and held her even when she was upside down. Had she not been wearing her seatbelt, she would have been thrown out of the vehicle, and possibly pinned under the vehicle. We have seen this happen when no seatbelts are used, and it usually results in a fatality. It is easy to panic when you find yourself hanging upside down in your vehicle. But take a breath, and think before you unbuckle yourself. When you unbuckle in this position, gravity dictates that you fall towards the ground. You will land on your head and may cause yourself an injury. Brace yourself with your free hand first. Look at what you will land on. Loose objects in a car fly around when a car is out of control and something sharp may be below your head. If you wait just a moment, a passerby may help you, or we will be there.

On December 12, we had training in traffic control. This is an important training. Responding to accidents on Highway 53 is one of the most dangerous things that we do. On average, about 5 firefighters, 20 law enforcement officers, and several medical responders are killed every year responding to highway accidents. The original accident may block lanes and slow or stop traffic flow. This causes stress and impatience in those who are traveling on that highway and can lead to secondary accidents. These secondary accidents are what kill responders. When we are at an accident scene, we are vulnerable. It is hard to detour traffic on our stretch of Highway 53. There are few side streets or crossovers. It is rare that we have to shut down the highway. This happens when the accident itself blocks both lanes with vehicles or debris or we have to land a helicopter on the highway. The important thing to remember is that we slow, divert, or stop traffic for your safety also. The slippery road conditions that contributed to the accident are still there. Many times we have to call in a snow plow to salt the road before we can reopen it. We try to keep the lane right next to the accident closed so that we and the wrecker have room to work. Vehicle accidents, especially roll-overs, result in a lot of glass and metal shards being scattered across the highway. We will clean this up so that your vehicle is not impacted. However, our first priority is the medical care of the injured. Then we must get an ambulance in and out of the area. A wrecker needs room to load the damaged vehicles. Then we clean up the debris and collect our cones and signs. We try to work quickly because the risk increases the longer we stay on scene. We wear high-visibility reflective clothing so that drivers can see us. Our engines and other vehicles are parked at an angle to protect us from out of control drivers. We put up signs and cones and use lights to direct traffic safely around the accident. When you come upon an accident scene, the most important things that you can do for us is SLOW DOWN and BE PATIENT. Obey those who are directing traffic. Pay attention to what is happening in front of you and beside you. Don't cause or become that secondary accident. If you are involved in an accident, call 911. We will be there to help you!