

News From The Ellsburg Volunteer Fire Department 20190206

Our February meeting took place on Wednesday, February 6, at 6:30 pm at the Bass Lake Firehall. Our March meeting will take place on Wednesday, March 6, at 6:30pm at the Bass Lake Firehall on Mink Road. All are welcome to attend. We discussed the installment plans for the washer extractor that we received a grant to purchase. We will need a little plumbing and electrical work. It should be ready to be installed by the end of February. This will put our department in compliance with the NFPA standards. Dewey Johnson, the Emergency Management Coordinator of the St. Louis County Sheriff's Office, and his team came to our firehall to inspect our record keeping for our portable radios. We received a grant last year to purchase more radios so that each of our responders has their own radio to communicate with. There are certain conditions that have to be met to satisfy the Department of Homeland Security's requirements. We met all of these requirements and can now put our radios into use.

On Saturday, February 9, our department was standing by at the annual Melrude Frolic. The Frolic took place on the hill of Arizona Road at the public access of Dinham Lake from 11am to 2pm. The Melrude Community Club sponsors this event. The morning started off at about -30 degrees, but luckily the temperatures warmed to about -10 by Frolic time. There were brats and hotdogs that were grilled by Arrlette Krog. The mustard and the marshmallows for the s'mores froze. Lee Voigt had a fire going. Deborah Feth sold raffle tickets and signed children up for the sled raffle. There were plenty of adults and children who came to race down the sliding hill on various sleds. The hill was a little sticky at first, but soon provided a fast run. It is a long hill to walk up. That walk can make you sweat. Then you fly down the hill on your sled with that cold wind whipping at you, and your sweat freezes. Eyelashes become frozen together and the snot freezes on your nose. All exposed skin becomes a bright cherry color. Then you head back up the hill and start the cycle all over again. Great fun, isn't it? It has been for over 50 years. Our department stands by in case there is an accident or another emergency. We also keep an eye on participants to look for signs of exhaustion and frostbite, or burns from the fire. Thankfully, there were no injuries. But we were prepared! We brought our Rescue 8 which contains our medical equipment. This vehicle towed a trailer holding our ATV with tracks and our Orion Rescue Sled. We brought our Rescue 3 which towed a trailer holding our 6X6 side-by-side. Chris Berg was bringing our snowmobile from our firehall through the trails off of Blackburn Drive to the Frolic. Unfortunately, the snowmobile broke down, and Chris was stranded. Chris was prepared and had followed the safety suggestions for snowmobiling. He had on a helmet and warm clothes. He had a radio and a charged phone so that he could call for help. People knew where he was planning to go, and he stayed on that trail. Jeff Dulinski, Loren Mesedahl, and Tim Linder rescued him using the ATV and Rescue Sled. What a great, real-life, training experience!

All fire departments have mandatory trainings that must take place every year. These include OSHA trainings on hazardous materials and carcinogens, CPR and AED refreshers, and emergency vehicle driving trainings. In addition, each department trains for various other emergencies which are dependent on the types of equipment that it has, and the types of emergencies that occur. For instance, our department does not have to train with a ladder engine because we do not need one. We have no high rise buildings in our township. Yet, a Virginia or Duluth fire department would need this. Our department needs to prepare for house and cabin fires, snowmobile and ATV accidents, water and ice rescues, wildland fires, hunting accidents, vehicle extrications, railroad accidents, and setting up a landing zone for a medical helicopter. We do not train with fire hydrants because we have none, but we do have to train with the pumps that allow us to get water out of the lakes and rivers in our area. We try to do at least one training session each month. Many times, we train with other departments like Cotton and Meadowlands, because we work frequently with these departments.

In January, our department met with several other departments at the Cotton Community Center for training on Firefighter Psychological Trauma and Suicide. Our instructors came from the EMS Education program at Century College. Chris Caulkins is a paramedic who has done much research

on suicide. Jessie Breyer-Peterson is a psychologist. First Responders, including firefighters and EMR's, are regularly exposed to death, serious illnesses and injuries, and violence. There is also the increase in occurrences of mass casualty incidents such as terroristic attacks and school and concert shootings. This can contribute to the development of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). We often hear about PTSD in reference to military veterans because of the horrific trauma and extreme levels of stress that they can experience. Statistics show that 50-70% of people in the U.S. experience trauma sometime in their lives. PTSD can affect anybody that has experienced a trauma. It is being recognized more frequently in the general population. All ages can experience PTSD. Sometimes, what is trauma for one person may seem insignificant to others. You may be told to "just get over it", or "man-up", or "move on". This belittling will prevent the sufferer from seeking help. In time, they may turn to suicide to escape the feelings of inadequacy or failure that are plaguing them. For years, first responders were quiet about symptoms of PTSD that they experienced because they were afraid that they would appear weak, or that they would lose their job if they were determined to have a "psych" problem. But, with the rising rates of suicide in first responders, it became imperative to acknowledge the existence of PTSD and form support networks for them.

Common reactions to trauma include nightmares, insomnia, depression, avoidance of thinking or talking about the incident, being easily startled, anger, irritability, feelings of guilt, negative views of yourself or others, trouble concentrating, displaying hypervigilance, difficulty with positive emotions, isolating yourself, withdrawing from activities, and increasing use of alcohol or other harmful behaviors. It is time to seek help for PTSD if you are not feeling better 4-6 weeks after a trauma, you are having trouble functioning at home and work, you are experiencing terrifying flashbacks and nightmares, you are having a difficult time relating to others, you have suicidal thoughts, and you avoid things that remind you of the trauma. Once the symptoms of PTSD are recognized and acknowledged by the sufferer, treatment can begin with a visit to your primary care physician, a VA center if you are a veteran, or by contacting the United Way's "First Call for Help" line by dialing 2-1-1 on your phone, or 1-800-543-7709. PTSD causes actual changes in the brain that can be seen on brain scans. Treatment involves medication and psychotherapy. If left untreated, PTSD can lead to depression and suicide. There are ways to support the PTSD sufferer. It helps if coworkers and family acknowledge and talk about the event, remind the sufferer that you are there for them and support them, watch for unhealthy reactions, and help the sufferer seek professional help. If you suffer from PTSD, it is helpful to limit media exposure to the traumatic event and refrain from viewing disturbing footage, recognize and accept your feelings and emotions, exercise regularly to burn off the adrenaline, eat a healthy diet to give you the strength to cope, reduce stress with mindful breathing and relaxation techniques, get plenty of sleep, establish a routine, and occupy your mind by reading, watching movies, cooking, or playing. It will benefit you to reach out to others to do "normal" things with you such as watching a game, going to an event, fishing, or whatever you enjoyed doing before the trauma. Finally, recognize when you cannot heal yourself and need professional help. There is no shame in asking for help. The symptoms of PTSD can be controlled with professional help. But the healing takes time. If you are having suicidal thoughts, seek help immediately. Call 911 and we will be there to help you.