

News from the Ellsburg Volunteer Fire Department 20200304

Our March meeting was held on Wednesday, March 4, at 6:30pm at the Bass Lake Firehall on Mink Road. Our April meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 1, at 6:30pm at the Bass Lake Firehall. All are welcome to attend!

We responded to four pages in February and one page in early March. Two of these pages were for vehicles running off of Highway 53 at mile marker 43 and mile marker 42. Luckily for the occupants, the median still had a lot of snow, and so there were cushioned landings and no injuries. The snow cushion is already gone in many places. Now you can see the wheel tracks and car parts that are left behind after the vehicle is pulled out of the median or side ditches. A rollover is much more dangerous now. Please always wear your seatbelt, and make sure that your passengers do. Check that babies are secured in their car seats or booster seats. We are amazed at times that occupants of cars are not seriously injured when you see the damage done to their car. Seatbelts keep the wearer inside the vehicle and help to prevent them from being thrown around inside a rolling vehicle. We have been horrified to see what happens when seatbelts are not worn and the occupant is thrown through the glass. In these cases, the victim can be thrown out of the vehicle and the vehicle lands on top of them. Not much chance of survival with this. Wear a seatbelt!

As of this writing, we have not been paged for coronavirus. But, we might. Be assured that we will respond to your call. The 911 operators are now instructed to ask a caller if there is a fever or if there has been travel. Please be truthful! An affirmative answer does not mean that you will be shunned, or that you will not get help. Rather, it helps us be prepared to attend to your needs. If we show up in masks, gloves, and gowns, we are only protecting ourselves, our families, other responders, and the people of our township. Masks and gowns are not mandatory in every call that we get, but they are mandatory for coronavirus. And, like toilet paper, they are in short supply and difficult to get in these times! We will respond to you, and we will care for you.

Our Chief Loren Mesedahl gave the fire department report at the annual Ellsburg Township meeting on March 10. The township gives our department financial support, and owns our buildings, so it is appropriate to share what we do with that support. There were few residents present at the meeting, but we did get inquiries about joining our department. We are always happy about that!

There has been a lot of extra work done by some of our members lately. Loren donated two new toilets to our department, which were installed by Loren, Justus, and Todd. Todd donated and installed a set of base cabinets to complete our kitchen reorganization. Todd and Jeff have been working on completing the work to transform our Freightliner to a tanker. The water tank is on, but now we need to stock the vehicle with all of the firefighting tools that are necessary to do the job. Todd has spent a lot of time welding brackets and other metal to accomplish the storage needs. A big thank-you to all of these volunteers! A special big thank-you to Todd Julin for all of the extra hours that you have been investing into these projects! Our bathrooms are updated, the kitchen area is more functional, and our Freightliner tanker will be a sight to see!

Our snowpack is melting as I sit and write this. This means that it is time to talk about ice safety. Ice has been deteriorating rapidly because of the recent warming/freezing cycles and rainfall. Ice thickness at this time of year can change quickly. Sometimes, ice that was fine when checked is not fine even an hour later. There are many factors that affect ice conditions. These include water depth, the size of the water body, water chemistry, currents, snow cover, age of the ice, and local weather. Stay away from waterways that have a current, springs, channels, bridges, culverts, and aeration systems because these areas are the first to have open water. Stay away from large cracks, depressions, or pressure ridges. Four inches of clear, newly formed ice may support the weight of one adult. However, a foot or more of old, partially thawed ice may not. It is imperative to have your ice picks, rope, ice chisel or drill, and tape measure with you if you are going to venture onto the ice. Make sure that you monitor the strength of the ice frequently. Wear a life jacket or a float coat. Keep children off the ice at this time. Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to be back. Carry your cell phone. Each year, several people fall through the ice in the springtime because of the rapidly changing ice conditions. We have already had some warming and refreezing days. The strength of the ice has already been compromised, even if it is still 2 feet thick.

If you fall through the ice, try not to panic. The shock of suddenly being immersed in cold water will make you inhale water and hyperventilate. Focus on controlling your breathing. Keep your clothes on. They can trap air which gives you warmth and flotation. A snowmobile suit is especially good at this. Turn to face the direction you came from because that ice was strong enough to hold you. Call for help. You have to fight to survive in cold water. Get your ice picks into your hands, and then place your hands and arms on the unbroken ice. Kick your feet and dig in with your ice picks to get yourself out of the water. Lie flat on the ice and roll away from the hole. This will spread out your weight. Get yourself to a warm, dry, sheltered area and call 911. Hypothermia needs medical attention.

If you see someone else fall through the ice, remember to Preach, Reach, Throw, Row, and Don't Go. To preach, call 911 and then shout to the victim that help is on the way. Encourage them to fight their way out of the water. If the victim is close to the shore, reach an object such as a rope, ladder, pole, wood, or even jumper cables to the victim. If you start to get pulled in, let go. Do not get on the ice with the victim because you will fall in also. If the victim is further away, try to throw something such as one end of a rope or something that will float. Tell the victim to tie or wrap it around him. Cold water quickly causes weakness, slowed thinking, and the inability to use the fingers. If the victim is out of reach, find a canoe or other lightweight boat to push across the ice with you. Attach a rope to the boat so that you can be pulled back. Make sure that you are wearing your life jacket. Bring your ice picks and a throwable flotation device. Push the boat to the victim. Get into the boat and help pull the victim in. Don't go to rescue someone unless you have a means to rescue yourself also. This means ice picks, lifejackets, and being tied with a rope. Victims can panic and grab for their rescuers, so beware. Don't become a victim, too!

As the snow melts away, last years dried grasses and shrubbery emerge. This is a dangerous time for wildfires. The ground dries out, the vegetation is dry or dead, the temperature warms up, and the wind blows. Every year, our township has a few wildfires. These fires are commonly caused by sparks from equipment, cars, trains, lawnmowers, etc. Serious wildfire season lasts until the rains green everything up. There is still a chance of wildfires throughout the summer and fall as drought and weather conditions change, but springtime holds the highest chance. Please keep this in mind as you begin your spring yard work. If you see a fire start, call 911 right away. These fires spread quickly!

This is also a good time to start thinking about landscaping around your home to help prevent wildfires from reaching your home. The [Firewise](#) program has many resources that can help you plan your defense. You need to develop three zones around your home or cabin. The first zone is called the structure or intensive zone, and is the area within five feet of your building. The second zone is called the defensible space or extensive zone, and encompasses 30 feet around your home. The third zone is the wild land or fuel reduction zone, and extends 100 feet beyond your home. There are many ideas for landscaping these areas to help prevent wildfires. I will share these ideas in a later column, but if you are interested in planning your landscaping now, give us a call at 218-482-3777. We have some brochures at our firehall that outline these areas and give suggestions on trimming and plants that can be used to decrease your chance of wildfires.