

Our March meeting took place on Wednesday, March 6. Our April meeting will be on Wednesday, April 3, 2019 at 6:30pm at the Bass Lake Firehall on Mink Road. All are welcome to attend. We discussed the road construction that will take place this spring on Comstock Lake Road. It is expected to last all summer. This construction will take place between Mink Road and Munger Shaw Road, and will involve replacing the two bridges in that area. Our department covers that area of Ellsburg township east of Munger Shaw Road, as well as portions of the Unorganized township past Ellsburg. The detour that we will need to take if there is an emergency east of Munger Shaw Road is to drive west on Comstock Lake Road, south on Highway 53, east on Three Lakes Road and then north on Munger Shaw Road to Comstock Lake Road. This is about a 30 mile detour and will drastically increase the amount of time that it will take us, or an ambulance, to respond to an emergency. It also affects the ability of our members that live east of the construction area to respond to our firehall. Meetings are taking place between the construction company, emergency management, and local fire departments to work out the logistics of responding to emergencies.

Our department joined several other local fire and ambulance departments to train on hazardous materials. These materials are transported through our township daily by trucks on the highway and trains. Transportation vehicles that are carrying hazardous materials must display placards, labels, and other markings that indicate what type of material is being transported. Hazardous materials can also be found in homes (cleaning products), garages, gardening supplies, warehouses, hospitals, laboratories, industrial buildings, bowling alleys, home improvement centers, restaurants, gas stations, and other businesses. These materials can be liquids, solids, or gases. Hazardous materials include explosives, gases, flammable combustible liquids, flammable solids, oxidizers, poisons, radioactive materials, corrosives, and other regulated materials. An accident or fire on the highway or rails, or in a home, garage, restaurant, gas station, or other building in our area could release dangerous levels of hazardous materials. As first responders, it is our responsibility to recognize when a hazardous material is present, identify it, notify the proper authorities, provide scene safety, and evacuate areas as necessary. Both Duluth and Grand Rapids have chemical assessment teams that will respond to our area in case of an emergency. The decontamination team must come from St. Paul.

Medical emergencies arise when hazardous material comes in contact with people. These poisons can enter the body through the eyes, skin, inhaled through the nose, or ingested through the mouth. Material found in homes, such as cleaning products, paint products, gasoline, and others are labelled with directions for first aid in case of exposure. In general, eyes should be flushed with eyewash or water for at least 15 minutes. Hold the eye open and move the eye side to side and up and down so that you can rinse behind the eyelids. For a skin contamination, remove contaminated clothing and put them in a plastic bag. Flood the skin with running water for 15 minutes. If a chemical has been inhaled, get to fresh air immediately. If something has been ingested, sip water to rinse the mouth and dilute the chemical. Do not induce vomiting. In all of the above situations, call 911 first! They can send help and also call the poison control center for help while you begin washing. It is very important that you get medical care for any exposure to hazardous materials. Even though you might feel okay now, chemicals can cause burns in the eyes, on the skin, in the airways and lungs, and in the mouth, esophagus, and stomach. These burns may not appear immediately, but they can cause swelling of the tissues which can result in difficulty breathing and fatal constriction of the airways. Chemicals that make it into the bloodstream can cause cardiac arrhythmias. Be safe! Call 911 and be evaluated.

Spring cleaning is a good time to look at your household cleaners and hazardous materials in your garage. The number one rule is to keep all of these products out of the reach of children. Keep them high on a shelf or in a locked cabinet to protect both children and pets. Think about the temperature where you are storing them. While most cleaners and chemicals should be stored at room temperature, some are flammable and should be kept away from a heat source or vent. Keep all products in their original container which lists contents and emergency first aid. Never store

chemicals in food containers. They can be mistaken for food. Also, chemicals can leach into the plastics and even "eat" their way out. We all have products that we use regularly, and some not as frequently. Check all of these products to make sure you can not smell them outside of their container, which could indicate a leak or that the lid is not on tight. Look at the surfaces around and under the container to make sure there is no leak. Check the container itself and make sure that it is the normal shape. When containers expand or contract, it could mean that they are being stored in an area that is too hot or does not have enough ventilation. This could lead to a serious situation such as toxic fumes, fire or explosion. This is especially true in garages or workshops where fuel products are stored.

Confined spaces are another source of hazardous material. Hydrogen sulfide gas is produced by anything that is decaying. This can fill up a confined space. Around our homes, common confined spaces are septic tanks, grain bins, wells, crawl spaces, and below ground basements with no ventilation. Be careful if you are cleaning out any of these areas, especially after a winter of no ventilation. Concrete is always decaying, and can produce hydrogen sulfide gas. Old grain and other vegetation can produce it also. A person can enter one of these areas and become unconscious because of the gas buildup. A coworker or family member sees this and enters the space to help. Now that person becomes unconscious also! 6 out of 10 deaths in confined spaces are those that enter a space to rescue someone overcome by gas. Call 911! We have breathing apparatus that allow us to enter safely. Be careful with your spring clean-up projects. Be aware of your surroundings and where your hazardous materials are. In an emergency, call 911 first. We will be there to help!