TOWN OF WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT

FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
STRATEGIC RISK ANALYSIS

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CHAPTER I – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMUNITY RISKS

Municipal Resources, Inc. (MRI) was engaged by the Wallingford, Connecticut, Town Council to undertake an organizational and operational assessment, including an analysis of the effectiveness and overall efficiency study of the town's fire, rescue, and emergency medical services (EMS) delivery systems, to identify any gaps or deficiencies, and to make recommendations for improvement.

The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department is a modern, well-equipped combination career and volunteer agency that serves the town with services that include: fire protection, basic and advanced life support emergency medical services, rescue, fire marshal, and emergency management (disaster preparedness).

The town's fire and EMS ecosystem is built on eight interdependent components that make it possible for the department to mitigate community risks and respond quickly and effectively to residents, visitors, and businesses that are dealing with potentially catastrophic events.

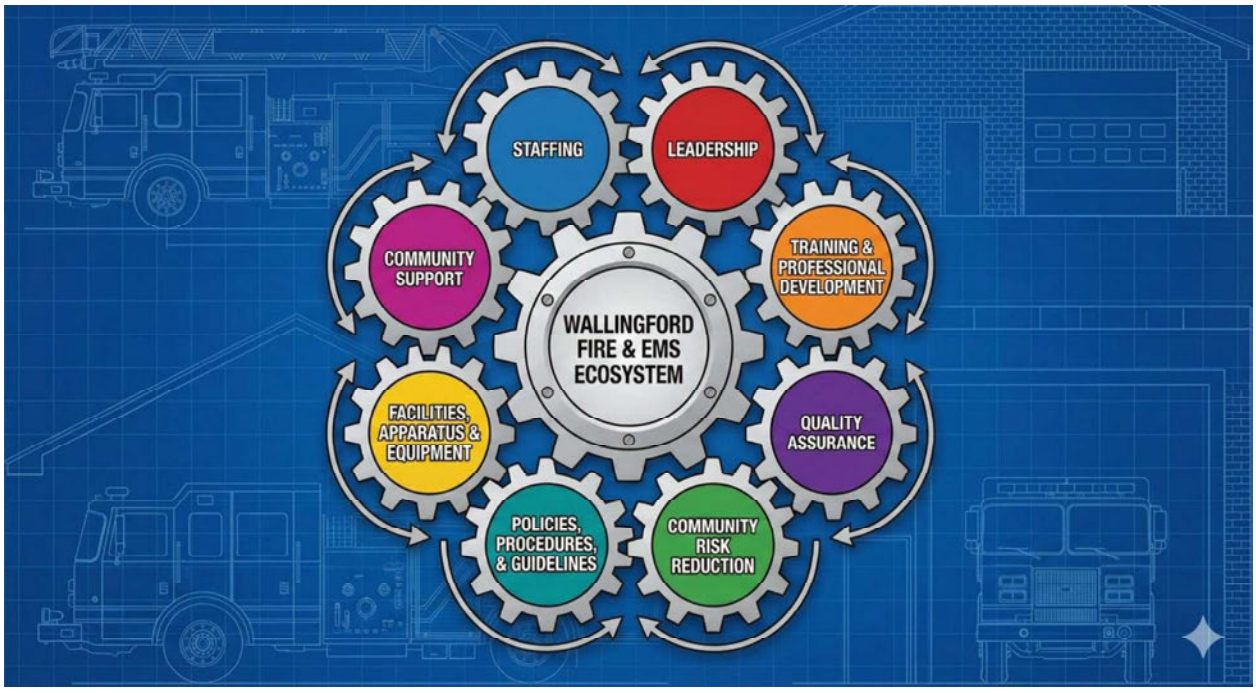


FIGURE I-1: WALLINGFORD FIRE & EMS ECOSYSTEM

Current State of the Department

Based on an extensive analysis of operations, interviews with stakeholders, and a review of data, MRI found that the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department is an organization at a critical crossroads. On the surface, the department is well-equipped with a modern fleet of apparatus and is staffed by a dedicated core of career and volunteer personnel who perform their emergency duties competently and safely. The community respects the department for its long-standing service, and the agency possesses the fundamental resources necessary to protect the town.

However, beneath this operational baseline, the department leadership is striving to overcome a long-standing crisis of culture and vision. Prior to 2024, there was a significant lack of a "common vision" among the various stakeholders—administration, career staff, volunteers, and town government. Specifically, the study team noted that there had been a challenging relationship between the town administration and the previous fire chief, which led to a breakdown in organizational discipline, communication deficits, and "end runs" around the established chain of command. Interviewees universally agreed that there continues to be improvement in morale, internal communications, and teambuilding, so our recommendations are intended to build on this forward momentum.

While the department successfully responds to daily emergencies, it is not adequately planning for the future. It lags behind industry best practices in critical areas such as the use of data for decision-making, strategic planning, professional development, and the adoption of modern technology for pre-incident planning. To meet the evolving needs of a growing Wallingford, the department must pivot from a "status quo" mindset to one of continuous improvement, unified by a shared strategic vision and supported by a collaborative labor-management partnership.

The following are strategic recommendations for consideration by the town council. Additional operational recommendations are found after each of the chapters in this report.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic Recommendation S-1: Determination of Acceptable Risk

The town council is the ultimate policymaker regarding the level of safety and protection the community is willing to accept. In simple terms, risk acceptance can range from having no fire or EMS service (everyone fends for themselves) to a fire and emergency services department that

is staffed and equipped to handle any conceivable incident of any size (always prepared for the worst-case scenario). Somewhere in between is the right balance based on the greatest risks, demographics, response times, actual service demand, and financial ability. The town council has the difficult task of evaluating community risks, establishing fire and EMS performance metrics based on nationally recognized standards and best practices, meeting citizen expectations for service, and understanding the willingness of voters to pay for those services. Fiscal decisions must also be balanced against other governmental needs.

***Based on our observations and assessments described in this report, the MRI study team recommends that the town council direct the Wallingford Fire & Emergency Services Department to base its strategic planning and aspirational goals on NFPA 1750, Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Services, Special Operations, and Fire Prevention Activities* (2026 edition)[1].**

The MRI study team has identified a significant risk in the current staffing levels of the fire and emergency services department. The department assigns firefighter-paramedics to three-person engine companies, which is a common fire service practice. When a critically ill or injured patient requires advanced life support (ALS) care (approximately 40% of all patient transports), a paramedic from the engine company accompanies the patient to the hospital in the ambulance, which reduces the engine company to a level of two personnel. This staffing level is considered unsafe and dramatically reduces the functionality of the engine company, which in turn reduces fire protection coverage in the town for an hour or more for each ALS incident.

The town should consider a staffing model that maintains a minimum of three personnel on engine and ladder companies. A number of options could be considered, including but not limited to:

- Assigning a paramedic round-the-clock to a non-transport paramedic intercept unit ("fly car") to reduce the frequency of needing an engine company paramedic to provide patient transport
- Increasing staffing levels to add a "floater" firefighter who can augment an engine company that is experiencing reduced staffing
- Increasing "minimum staffing" so that all engine and ladder companies are staffed with four personnel, which provides for flexibility during ALS calls but also significantly increases emergency operational effectiveness and efficiency
- Enhancing regional collaboration for automatic aid and mutual aid (discussed below)

[1] www.nfpa.org/1550

Strategic Recommendations S-2 & S-3: Financial Strategy and Revenue Generation

The 2025-2026 fire and emergency services budget ($11,753,090) relies heavily on general taxation, but is offset by $2.7 million in ambulance billing, $10,000 in fire marshal revenue, and $1,000 in miscellaneous revenue. The Fire Department general fund revenues represent 23 percent of Fire Department general fund expenditures.

Future ambulance revenues will be negatively impacted if there are reductions in Medicare and Medicaid payments and eligibility. The federal government is considering prohibiting balance billing (also known as surprise billing)[2] and state legislation may eliminate balance billing as part of a restructuring of the EMS fee schedule.

To date, federal grant programs for fire departments continue to be funded. Those programs include the FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program and the FEMA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program. These grants fund the purchase of fire apparatus and equipment, enable communities to increase their full-time firefighter staffing, and support volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention programs.

Unfortunately, Connecticut municipalities are not empowered to assess commercial development impact fees that could potentially fund the expansion of fire and EMS services based on the anticipated impact of a major commercial or residential project.

The town's volunteer fire departments (as independent non-profit 501(c)3 organizations) are able to recoup $500 per incident from the state for responses on designated limited access highways.

Other opportunities for increasing fire and emergency services department revenues could include:

- Adoption of a fee schedule for fire marshal plan reviews based on a sliding scale of project size and cost.

[2] Balance billing is the recovery from the patient of the difference between what the Town bills for ambulance transport and what a private insurance company actually pays.

- Billing for "treat/no transport" (TNT) EMS services. The 2026 CT EMS Rate Schedule establishes rates for basic life support (BLS) and advanced life support (ALS) treat/no transport services. Medicare and Medicaid do not pay for TNT services.
- Fire alarm system registration and false alarms.
- Billing for hazardous materials clean-up.
- Increasing the hours of the peak demand ambulance (Medic 3) based on actual response data, including the potential for staffing Medic 3 24 hours/day, 7 days per week.
- Implementation of a mobile integrated health (MIH) program (discussed below).

The MRI project team recommends that the town actively pursue additional general fund revenue opportunities and grants that would strengthen fire department staffing and operational effectiveness.

According to the town's purchasing policy, any purchase over $1000 is considered to be a capital purchase. Many Connecticut municipalities define a capital purchase as a non-recurring expense for an asset lasting five or more years that costs $10,000 or more. The 2025-2026 Fire Department budget shows 64 capital requests. If the $10,000, 5-year life, non-recurring threshold were established by the town, only 13 requests would meet this definition. The remainder would be placed in operating budget equipment or maintenance lines. Changing the definition of a capital purchase would increase the flexibility of the department to address changing needs and changing technologies throughout the year, rather than being locked into specific purchases many months ahead of the final budget approval. It would not change the process for seeking competitive bids or following the required purchase order procedure, and the department would still be held accountable for what it is requesting and spending.

The MRI project team recommends that the town consider adopting a definition of a capital expense as a non-recurring expense for an asset lasting five or more years that costs $10,000 or more.

Strategic Recommendation S-4: Community Risk Reduction

Community risk reduction (CRR) is a process to identify and prioritize local risks, followed by the integrated and strategic investment of resources to reduce their occurrence and impact. For the fire and emergency services department, CRR initiatives can include fire prevention programs, public education programs for fire and EMS, and emergency management (disaster) hazard mitigation initiatives. Successful community risk reduction efforts can stabilize or reduce the overall costs, both public and private, for responding to and recovering from a catastrophic event. For example, according to an economic study by Allstate, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and

the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, found that every $1 spent on climate resilience and preparedness saves communities $13 in damages, cleanup costs, and economic impact. Community risk reduction initiatives such as fire prevention (inspections, code enforcement, and public education), EMS public training programs, and mobile integrated health programs (discussed below) can save lives, reduce property damage, reduce medical costs and insurance costs, and strengthen overall community resilience.

The MRI project team recommends that the town council commission the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department as the lead agency for the development of a town-wide community risk reduction plan and provide appropriate resources for the development of the CRR plan. The plan should be aligned with NFPA 1300, Standard on Community Risk Assessment and Community Risk Reduction Plan Development (2026 edition)[3].

The community risk reduction planning process should be a collaborative, multi-agency effort that could include participation or resources from organizations such as:

- Town of Wallingford Departments
  - Education
  - Engineering
  - Health
  - Planning & Zoning
  - Police
  - Program Planning
  - Youth & Social Services
- South Central Regional Council of Governments (SCRCOG)
- CT Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security
- Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce
- Hartford HealthCare/Midstate Medical Center
- Community non-profit and service organizations

Strategic Recommendation S-5: Training & Professional Development:

Training and professional development are key elements of operational excellence and community risk reduction for both fire and EMS. A robust training and professional development program ensures that WFD personnel are highly skilled, operate as a smoothly coordinated team,

[3] www.nfpa.org/1300

and they stay abreast of evolving hazards, tactics, technology, and managerial best practices. Citizens are better protected from fire and other threats and receive high-level emergency medical care. As a result, the town's liability is minimized.

The town should continue to support, through its budget and policies, the training and professional development initiatives of the Wallingford Fire & Emergency Services Department in accordance with an annual strategic training plan developed by the department.

The overarching goal of the strategic training plan is to ensure that all members are trained and competency is maintained to execute all responsibilities of the department. It must be based on Wallingford's specific hazards and risks.

The training plan should be aligned with NFPA 1750, *Standard for Deployment Operations and Systems* (2026 edition), and NFPA 1550, *Standard for Emergency Responder Health & Safety* (2024 edition). The training plan should include the following components:

- Firefighter and EMT recruit orientation & training
- In-service training goals and objectives
- EMS recertification training goals and objectives
- Supervisory training goals and objectives
- Specialized training goals and objectives
- Professional development and advancement goals and objectives
- Succession planning
- A process for monitoring the attainment of training plan metrics and updating the plan throughout the year

Strategic Recommendation S-6: Labor-Management Relations

The benefits of collaborative rather than adversarial relations between the town and the firefighter collective bargaining unit are many. Positive relations improve operational performance and morale, strengthen health and safety, improve budget management, and enhance the public's trust. Regular, robust communications between the parties can avoid time-consuming and costly grievance and arbitration processes. The first step in strengthening labor-management relations is identifying one or more areas of common interest, such as employee health and safety or the delivery of skilled services to the public.

The MRI project team recommends the establishment of a formal joint labor-management committee (JLMC) comprised of fire department leadership and representatives of Wallingford Professional Firefighters IAFF Local 1326.

The committee should meet on a regular basis with a formal agenda and minutes. The purpose of the committee is to create a structured, non-adversarial forum where union leadership and department administration can address issues outside of the collective bargaining process. The committee can engage in collaborative problem solving, resolve non-contractual disputes, and take proactive steps to avoid contractual disputes and grievances. It can provide a forum for labor and management to discuss, explore, and study problems of mutual interest in order to strengthen trust, improve safety, and enhance the delivery of services to the community.

Strategic Recommendation S-7: Strengthening the Volunteer System

The Town of Wallingford is fortunate to have two active volunteer fire companies that respond to fire, EMS, and rescue emergencies in their respective districts and support the career fire companies at major events anywhere in the town. Volunteer fire and EMS services throughout the U.S. are experiencing a dramatic loss of membership, so it is critical for the town and the fire department to aggressively support volunteer recruitment and retention initiatives.

The town has adopted the provisions of a volunteer fire and EMS length of service awards program (LOSAP)[4] which includes property tax abatements ranging from $705 to $2,000 per year, depending on the length of service, and a stipend of $1,500 based on a point system for training and participation in emergency responses and other activities. LOSAP is a critical component of volunteer recruitment and retention and should be continued.

The MRI project team recommends that the town establish a formal volunteer fire and EMS recruitment and retention program.

This program can be based on resources that are available from the National Volunteer Fire Council[5], such as:

- Make Me a Firefighter Program™
- Fire Corps®

[4] See Chapter 2023, Article 6 of the Town of Wallingford Ordinances,
[5] www.nvfc.org

- National Junior Firefighter Program

Fire & EMS Exploring[6] is another excellent hands-on program open to young men and women from the 6th grade to 20 years old with an interest in learning more about careers in fire, EMS, and emergency services.

Strategic Recommendation S-8: Mobile Integrated Health/Community Paramedicine

A mobile integrated health (MIH) program operated by a municipal fire/EMS department is a patient-centered healthcare delivery model designed to utilize emergency medical service providers in non-emergency roles to fill gaps in local healthcare systems. These programs deploy paramedics to provide out-of-hospital care, focusing on chronic disease management, post-hospital discharge follow-up, and preventative services for underserved populations. By proactively addressing the needs of post-hospital patients and those with chronic conditions, MIH programs aim to facilitate more appropriate use of emergency resources, thereby reducing unnecessary 911 calls and emergency room visits. Furthermore, these initiatives can potentially generate alternative revenue streams for the department through reimbursement arrangements for community-based transport and care services.

Because of its existing fire department paramedic service, Wallingford is ideally positioned to implement an MIH/community paramedicine program. The program would become an important component of the region's health care system and would be a critical asset for the town's aging population. Numerous successful programs can be modeled, and the program should align with NFPA 455, *Standard for Emergency Medical Services*[7] (2026 edition).

The MRI project team recommends that the town, in collaboration with Hartford HealthCare/Midstate Medical Center, other health care providers, and the Connecticut Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS), explore the feasibility of implementing a mobile integrated health/community paramedicine program managed by the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department.

Strategic Recommendation S-9: Information Technology & Cybersecurity

Up-to-date information technology systems, data analysis, and robust cybersecurity are essential for the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department to deploy resources, operate safely

[6] Fire & EMS Exploring: https://www.exploring.org/fire-ems/
[7] www.nfpa.org/455

and effectively, identify critical needs, analyze response trends, and justify budgetary needs. The department contracts with an external vendor for IT services, which ensures round-the-clock service for IT-related issues.

The department participates in the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) through the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) and submits patient care data to the Connecticut EMS Tracking and Reporting System (CEMSTARS) through the Connecticut Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS).

The MRI project team identified several areas that need improvement to meet fire service best practices:

- Use of data and performance metrics to inform the community relative to service demand and operations
- Pre-incident planning
- Fire prevention/fire marshal IT and data capabilities
- The department may not be fully utilizing all of the features of its existing software platforms
- Station and personnel alerting systems
- The department email system is on a .com domain which erodes confidence that emails are originating from a legitimate government agency and creates cybersecurity vulnerabilities

The MRI project team recommends that the town council commission a strategic information technology plan for the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department.

The IT strategic plan should include the following components:

- SWOT analysis[8] and needs assessment (including future needs such as next generation telemedicine capabilities)
- Station infrastructure (physical security, Wi-Fi, station alerting systems, etc.)
- Mobile architecture (mobile data terminals, connectivity, biomedical integration, etc.)
- Software applications (records management, patient reporting, fire incident reporting, staffing and scheduling, asset and inventory management, electronic plans review, fire inspection scheduling and reporting, pre-incident planning, etc.)

[8] A SWOT analysis identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

- Data management, interoperability, and GIS (including tools for analyzing response times, clinical performance, and community risk reduction data)
- Cybersecurity and Compliance
    - HIPAA compliance
    - Disaster recovery continuity of operations planning (COOP)
    - Transitioning to the town's .gov email domain for improved cybersecurity and recognition of the department as a legitimate government agency
- Technology lifecycle management
- Updated social media policy
- Support and training

Strategic Recommendation S-10: Regional Collaboration Policy

Generally speaking, New England lags far behind other regions of the US in the adoption of regional approaches to fire and EMS services. In many states, fire and EMS departments are county-based or operated by special regional government districts. With very few exceptions, New England fire departments are organized and operate based on long-standing municipal boundaries. Interestingly, the concept of fire mutual aid originated in New England, and the first US international fire mutual aid agreement is the Northeastern Forest Fire Protection Compact (NFFPRC)[9] that includes all of New England and five (5) Canadian provinces.

The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department participates in or can request support through a number of regional initiatives, including:

- Mutual aid (giving and receiving) with area fire and EMS agencies
- New Haven Special Hazards Team (NHASH)
- New Haven County Task Force
- Incident Management Team-West

Urban search and rescue resources are available from the Urban Search and Rescue, Connecticut Task Force 1.

[9] https://www.nffpc.org/en

As personnel costs, capital costs, and service demands increase throughout the region, it is incumbent upon municipalities to identify better ways to coordinate and share fire and EMS resources.

Regional initiatives that could be considered include:

- Coordinated capital equipment planning
- Coordinated fire and EMS station location planning
- Group purchasing
- Training and training facilities
- Apparatus maintenance and repair
- Emergency dispatching and communications
- Enhanced mutual aid and automatic aid
- Standardized operational guidelines and procedures
- Disaster and mass casualty response and recovery planning, coordination, drills, and exercises
- Recruitment
- Grants

Careful consideration should be given to the impact of any potential regional initiatives on the WFD collective bargaining agreement.

The MRI project team recommends that the town council engage with surrounding communities to explore opportunities for increased sharing and coordination of fire and EMS resources and programs. This initiative could potentially be sponsored or facilitated by the South Central Regional Council of Governments (SCRCOG).

COMMUNITY RISKS

Based on our observations during team visits to Wallingford and our review of documents provided by the town, the MRI project team has identified the following most critical community risks at the present time. Risks will vary over time based on mitigation efforts or the introduction of new risks to the community and should be reviewed on a regular basis as part of the town's proposed community risk reduction program.

The following list is not presented in any particular order or priority.

1. **Rail or Transportation Incidents with Hazardous Releases**

   Classified as a "special risk," this includes incidents involving the Amtrak/CT Rail Hartford Line and highway incidents that result in the release of hazardous smoke or materials.

   Mitigation strategies: pre-incident planning, standard operating guidelines (SOGs); continued participation in the New Haven Special Hazards Team (NHASH); public safety agency training; citizen evacuation and alerting capabilities; regional disaster planning, exercises, and drills.

2. **Fires in Industrial Buildings with Hazardous Materials**

   Also, a "special risk," this involves fires at industrial complexes where hazardous materials are present. Specific target hazards include the BYK facility, a fertilizer plant, and flammable and combustible liquid and gas tank farms.

   Mitigation strategies: inspections and code enforcement; SOGs; pre-incident planning; continued participation in the New Haven Special Hazards Team (NHASH); public safety agency training; citizen evacuation and alerting capabilities; regional disaster planning, exercises, and drills.

3. **Mass Casualty Incidents (MCI)**

   Incidents involving more than 25 patients are categorized as a "special risk". High-capacity venues such as the Oakdale Theatre (capacity of 6,500), schools, and houses of worship are potential locations for such events. Mass transit (rail and bus) incidents could also result in mass casualties.

   Mitigation strategies: pre-incident planning; SOGs; public safety agency training; stockpiling of mass casualty medical supplies and equipment; mass casualty planning, exercises, and drills.

4. **Working Fires in Structures Greater than Three Floors**

   Fires in tall structures pose unique challenges for evacuation and fire suppression, requiring aerial operations and extensive resources, categorized as a "special risk".

   Mitigation strategies: inspections and code enforcement; public fire safety education programs; pre-incident planning; SOGs; specialized high-rise firefighting equipment; training, drills, and exercises; automatic aid.

5. **Explosions**

   Any explosion inside or outside a building that creates exposure to occupied buildings or threatens life safety is considered a "special risk".

   Mitigation strategies: inspections and code enforcement; pre-incident planning; SOGs; citizen evacuation and alerting capabilities; training, drills, and exercises.

6. **Fires in Large Commercial Properties and Target Hazards**

   Categorized as "high risk," these are fires in large commercial properties requiring a sustained attack with fire flows greater than 1,000 gallons per minute. Non-sprinklered commercial retail and office buildings are specifically noted as high risk.

   Mitigation strategies: inspections and code enforcement; pre-incident planning; SOGs; training, drills, and exercises; automatic aid.

7. **Major Hazardous Materials Releases**

   Distinct from industrial fires, this "high risk" category involves the major release of hazardous materials that causes exposure to persons, threatens life safety, or significant environmental impact.

   Mitigation strategies: inspections and code enforcement; pre-incident planning; SOGs; continued participation in the NHASH; citizen evacuation and alerting capabilities; regional training, drills, and exercises.

8. **High-Risk Technical Rescues**

   This "high risk" category includes complex rescue operations requiring specialized skills and equipment, such as structural collapse, confined space rescue, trench rescue, and high-angle rescue.

   Mitigation strategies: pre-incident planning; SOGs; training, drills, and exercises in collaboration with Urban Search and Rescue, CT Task Force 1.

9. **Fires in Non-sprinklered Multi-Family Residential Buildings**

   Fires in multi-family residential structures that lack sprinkler systems are classified as "high risk". Residential fires during sleeping hours are the greatest fire safety concern due to potential life loss.

Mitigation strategies: inspections and code enforcement; public fire safety education programs; pre-incident planning; SOGs; training, drills, and exercises, automatic aid.

10. Severe Medical Emergencies (Cardiac/Respiratory Arrest)

Life-threatening medical emergencies, specifically cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, and severe bleeding are classified as "high risk" events requiring rapid intervention. EMS calls account for approximately 80% of the department's call volume.

Mitigation strategies: Citizen training programs in CPR, use of automatic external defibrillators (AEDs), and "Stop the Bleed"[10]; placement of AEDs and Stop the Bleed kits in all public buildings; placement of AEDs and Stop the Bleed kits in all police cruisers and other town vehicles (e.g., fire and building inspectors); implementation of a HEARTSafe Community program[11]; EMS training and certification; EMS quality assurance (QA) reviews; ASHER[12] planning and training.

Executive Summary, Strategic Recommendations, and Community Risks Conclusion

The recommendations outlined in this executive summary and detailed throughout this report are designed to serve as a roadmap for transforming the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services department. They are not merely a list of tasks, but a strategic framework intended to stabilize the department's culture, enhance operational safety through improved staffing and training, and ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the town's emergency services. Implementing these measures will require difficult decisions and a renewed commitment to collaboration from all parties, but they are essential to ensuring that the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department remains a vibrant, effective, and community-centered organization for decades to come.

The MRI project team would like to thank Mayor Vincent Cervoni, Town Councilors Joseph Morone, Jesse Reynolds, and Thomas Laffin, Fire Chief James Buck, and the career and volunteer members of the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department who participated in interviews and site visits. Without their cooperation, professionalism, and courtesy, this report would not have been possible.

[10] https://www.stopthebleed.org/
[11] https://citizencpr.org/heartsafe-community/
[12] ASHER: Active Shooter/Hostile Event Response. See NFPA 3000, *Standard for Active Shooter/Hostile Event (ASHER) Program*, 2024 edition, www.nfpa.org/3000.

CHAPTER II - PROJECT OVERVIEW, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Municipal Resources, Inc. (MRI) was engaged by the Wallingford, Connecticut, Town Council to undertake an organizational and operational assessment, including an analysis of the effectiveness and overall efficiency study of the town's fire, rescue, and emergency medical services (EMS) delivery systems, to identify any gaps or deficiencies, and to make recommendations for improvement. Projected growth in area services due to increases in population and increased service levels were also included to provide recommendations on the department's long-range planning needs. The primary intent and goal of this project was to determine whether the existing organizational structure and operations of the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department including levels of staffing, facilities, equipment, funding, management practices, and deployment of resources are adequate to provide a level of service in Wallingford that are in line with generally accepted standards and benchmarks utilized by comparable fire departments in similar communities and are based on standards and best practices for modern-day fire services currently in practice in Connecticut and the United States.

To these ends, MRI has provided information related to:

1. Short-term opportunities for improvement of the department's service delivery capabilities.

2. Identify future needs for facilities and equipment.

3. Present short- and long-term organizational and operational adjustments that seek to improve service delivery to the town.

These activities are part of the Town of Wallingford's ongoing fire and emergency services oversight and planning responsibilities. They are focused on identifying the risks that residents, visitors, and firefighters are currently exposed to, as well as the potential future risks. Through the strategic planning aspect, the project team makes recommendations for long-term success, viability, and stability, together with improved efficiency, operations, and safety for firefighters and citizens today, as well as projecting future needs for the provision of fire and emergency medical services throughout the community. The MRI project team has attempted to produce a

report containing recommendations, focused primarily on long-range strategic planning, that will assist the WFD and the Town of Wallingford to set a clear course of action for future service improvements and delivery.

About MRI

MRI was founded in 1989 by six former municipal and state government managers, with both public and private professional experience. MRI provides professional, technical, and management support services to municipalities, schools, and non-profit organizations throughout the Northeast. MRI provides technical knowledge and practical experience that others cannot offer because it hires the best in the municipal consulting industry. This is evidenced by a high level of implementation of MRI's recommendations by its clients. MRI's clients have come to expect the organization to provide whatever they need, and it fulfills their expectations.

MRI's dynamic management staff adapts services to specific client needs. Clients realize that MRI has been in their shoes and has the experience, sensitivity, and desire that it takes to develop and deliver services that specifically meet their needs. The depth of MRI's experience is reflected not only in the experiences of its associates, but in the scope of services it provides its clients, from professional recruitment to organizational and operational assessments of individual municipal departments and school districts, or ongoing contracted services for various municipal government and school business support activities. Municipal Resources has a particularly strong public safety group with nationally recognized expertise in fire and emergency medical services.

MRI's professional staff is always focused on helping its clients solve problems and provide solutions for their future success. We simply work to gain an understanding of past events to build a framework for future success. We do not put forth idealistic, unachievable, or narrowly focused solutions.

MRI's Philosophy

Municipal Resources, Inc. is committed to providing innovative and creative solutions to the problems and issues facing local governments and the agencies that serve them.

The purpose of MRI's approach is to supplement the efforts of municipal employees and other personnel and enable them to do their jobs well. MRI is committed to supporting and enhancing

positive, sustainable communities through better organization, operations, and communication. This is achieved by:

- Supporting cities, counties, school districts, and other community service agencies with management and technical services to facilitate constructive change within client organizations.
- Conducting studies and analyses designed to assist clients in achieving organizational improvement.
- Advocating and advancing cooperation, coordination, and collaboration between government organizations and related community support agencies.
- Maintaining a staff of highly qualified professionals, experienced and open-minded life-long learners to serve as consultants and advisors to clients.
- Maintaining awareness and understanding of advances in "best practices" for the delivery of all levels of core community services and related professional management.
- Developing and refining techniques for effective community engagement, information dissemination, and constructive change.

Objectives

1. To help municipalities and agencies obtain maximum value for limited tax dollars.

2. To identify and help communities manage the risks associated with public safety functions.

3. To raise public awareness of the value and professionalism of their municipal resources.

4. To help local leaders develop and execute plans that best meet their community's needs, given available resources.

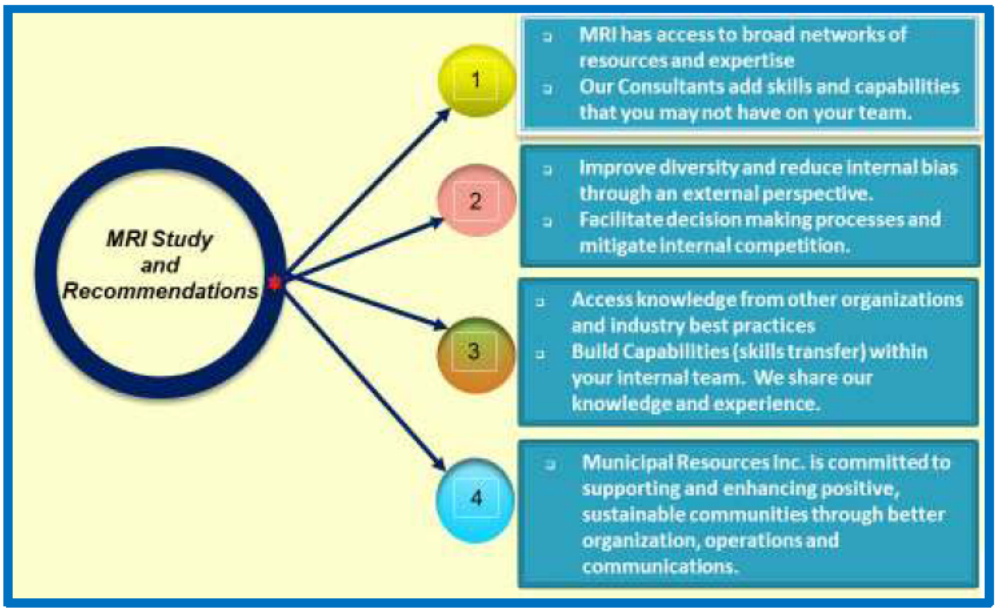


FIGURE II-1: MRI PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Scope of Work and Methodology

The project included an assessment to determine the baseline of current operations. Projected growth in area services due to increases in population and increased service levels were evaluated to provide recommendations on the department's long-range plans. A thorough review of existing staffing, funding, and regulatory environment was performed to determine whether the department is able to provide a level of service that is in line with generally accepted standards and benchmarks for a community of like character. We took the following information and topics under consideration when conducting the review:

MRI addressed the following issues and standards as part of the study:

- Recommendations to enhance efficiency and effectiveness and provide a fiscally sustainable and cost-contained system.

Deployment functions, including but not necessarily limited to:

- Capacity, reliability, timing, and effectiveness of all fire and EMS alarm assignment(s).
- Effectiveness of command function on multi-unit and complex incidents.

- Effectiveness of technical rescue response.
- Effectiveness of hazardous material response.
- Staffing level and adequacy analysis for both fire and EMS responses.
- Analysis of community risk, including but not limited to special hazards of high-density residential units, high-rise units, commercial occupancies, rail, and interstate highway/freeway.
- Assessment of use and effectiveness of mutual aid.
- Assessment of dispatching and records management system (RMS) efficiency and effectiveness.

Non-Deployment Functions, including but not limited to:

- General administrative review and assessment.
- Public outreach and education program.
- Facility maintenance.
- Apparatus program and maintenance.
- Communications and IT system program and maintenance.
- Personnel administration.
- Finance and department budgeting.
- Fire prevention and investigation, including inspection program.
- EMS program administration and transport division.
- Pre-incident planning.
- Operational and administrative currency of standard operating guidelines, policies, strategic plan.
- Safety and health program.
- Disaster and emergency management planning and coordination.

The study focused on the following areas:

- Review of fire service data and operational information as provided by the town;
- Review of incident volume and trends;
- Review response times;
- Review the average number of responders for each incident type;
- Evaluate the provision and use of fiscal resources, including the amount of overtime and mutual aid;

- Conduct a review of scheduling and staffing;
- Assess service demand trends, including demographic and service demand increases;
- Assess and evaluate the department's current staffing, organization, and delivery of services, with the primary focus being emergency medical response;
- Tour the community and conduct review of community demographics and target hazards;
- Review current recruitment and retention efforts;
- Review the location and effectiveness of fire facilities;
- Tour and comment on the adequacy of fire service facilities;
- Develop a report that will address short and long-term staffing needs, organizational structure, service demand trends, apparatus set configuration, training, and facility needs over the next decade.

The study's methodology included:

- Review of existing department incident statistics, practices, and records associated with the subject areas;

- Interviewing the fire chief, members of the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department, command staff, Mayor, and members of the Town Council, and other designees, having direct knowledge and understanding of the subject areas.

MRI produced a draft and final written report that includes:

- A detailed and well-organized narrative describing the study's scope, methodology, findings, options, and recommendations. Recommendations will distinguish between policies and strategies that can be adopted by the Mayor and Town Council versus operational and tactical initiatives for the fire and emergency services department.

- Identification of industry "best practices", nationally recognized standards, and benchmarks for the subject areas.

- Any necessary supporting data and information.

The review includes proposed changes to address current and future needs that may arise. This project covers a minimum of a ten-year look ahead and identifies opportunities for phasing in any changes.

MRI furnished the necessary qualified personnel, materials, and services, and worked closely with the Mayor and Fire Chief as required to accomplish the work.

During this project, MRI completed the following specific actions:

1. Data analysis based on data sources or data provided by the Mayor and Fire Chief.

2. Met with the town to determine parameters that they feel are appropriate for this process.

3. Identified a service vision and goals that place patient care and sureness of response as the primary objective.

4. Direct interviews of key officials as listed in the scope of services, including those selected by the Fire Chief and the Mayor.

5. Interviews of chiefs/directors of surrounding fire and ambulance services, review of mutual aid operations and mutual aid backup agreements, as well as resource capabilities.

6. Development of short and long-term staffing models.

CHAPTER III - COMMUNITY AND & ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW



The Town of Wallingford

The Town of Wallingford is located within New Haven County, centrally located between New Haven and Hartford, and Boston and New York City. The community sits astride the Quinnipiac River in northern New Haven County, approximately 92 miles northeast of New York City. The towns bordering Wallingford are Cheshire, Durham, Hamden, Meriden, Middlefield, North Branford, and North Haven. The community roadways consist of U.S. Route 5, Interstate 91, state highways Route 15, Route 68, Route 71, and Route 150. The town covers approximately 39.9 square miles, of which .9 square miles (2.16%) is water. The population of Wallingford in 2022 was approximately 44,446 residents, not including the population protected on private school campuses. The town has an overall population density of 1,100 people per square mile.

There are several public elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. There are also three private schools: Choate Rosemary Hall (residential and day school), Heritage Baptist Academy, and Holy Trinity School.

The population of the town has seen varying increases since 1960, which is one of the indicators of increased impacts on public safety staffing, equipment, and operations.

Census	Population	Change
1960	29,920	
1970	35,714	19.4%
1980	37,274	4.4%
1990	40,822	9.5%
2000	43,026	5.4%
2010	45,135	4.9%
2020	44,396	-1.6%
2022	44,446	.099%

FIGURE III-1 WALLINGFORD POPULATION TRENDS

Wallingford consists of a diverse mix of residential and commercial occupancies, which are located throughout the town. There is a robust commercial industry with approximately 500 commercial businesses.

Rank	Employer	Approximate # of employees
1	Town of Wallingford	1,478
2	Anthem BC/BS	1,225
3	Gaylord Hospital	529
4	Community Health Network of CT	438
5	Masonic Healthcare Center	417
6	Choate Rosemary Hall	299
7	Ulrich Stainless Steels & Medals	215
8	BYK	197
9	Thurston Foods Inc.	169
10	Fosdick Fulfillment Corp	157

FIGURE III-2: WALLINGFORD TOP TEN EMPLOYERS

Wallingford is located on the Amtrak/CT Rail Hartford Line with daily passenger service to points north and south, providing direct access to New York City and Boston. Wallingford is served by one of a few municipally owned electric utility companies in Connecticut.



The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department

The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department (WFD) is a combination all hazards, emergency services organization that delivers fire, rescue, and emergency medical services (EMS) to the Town of Wallingford with 90 (January 2026) full-time employees (FTEs), one part-time employee, and approximately 40 volunteer firefighters split between two companies (Company 7, North Farms and Company 8, East Wallingford). Currently, WFD personnel are working out of four fire stations. The authorized career staffing level is currently one fire chief, two deputy fire chiefs (operations, EMS & training), four battalion chiefs, 16 shift lieutenants, two EMS

lieutenants[13] (January 2026), 41 firefighters, 18 emergency medical technicians (EMTs), one fire marshal, and two deputy fire marshals. Administrative support is provided by three full-time and one part-time civilian administrative assistants. In total, there are twelve employees in the administrative division who work a Monday through Friday schedule.

All line personnel work on one of four platoons, and each platoon is commanded by a battalion chief. In addition to the fire suppression staff, there are three ambulances that cover the town. Two are on duty 24/7, and the third is staffed during peak hours, Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 4 PM. Each platoon consists of 15 or 16 fire suppression personnel and works to a minimum shift strength of 14 personnel. The EMS division, which is staffed separately, has a four-person minimum per shift staffing Medic 1 and Medic 2. Medic 3 is the peak hour ambulance staffed with 2 EMTs.

[13] These positions have been reclassified as "medical and safety officers" with responsibility for both EMS operations and occupational health and safety. A medical and safety officer will be assigned to two of the four on-duty platoons. For consistency, the narrative in this report refers to the activities and assignment of the EMS lieutenant that were in place at the time of MRI site visits. The MRI project team concurs with this reclassification and supports the future addition of two additional medical and safety officers (one per platoon).

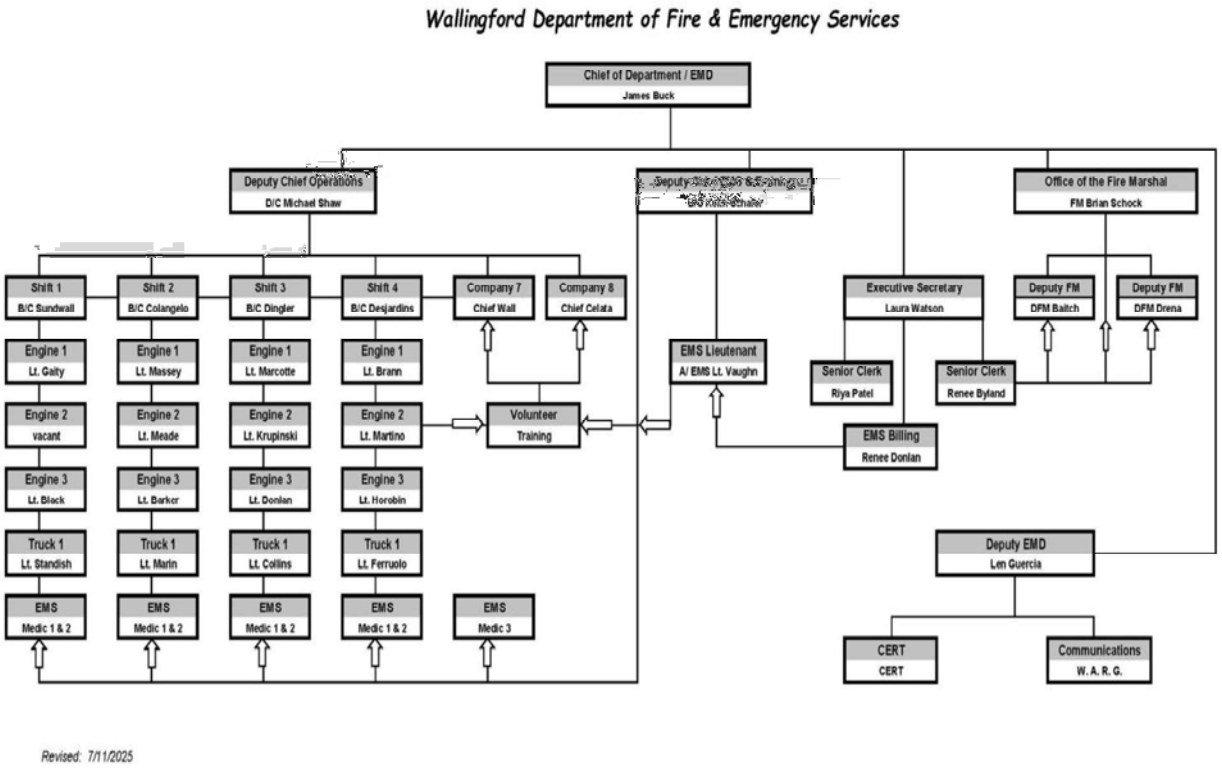


FIGURE III-3 – WALLINGFORD FIRE DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART – JULY 2025

EMT- Basic	17
Firefighter – EMT	39
Firefighter Paramedic	24
Total	**80**

FIGURE III-4 – CAREER STAFF EMS CERTIFICATIONS

The Town of Wallingford has a long and proud fire service history that dates back many years, starting with its volunteer fire departments. Today, the department not only has two active volunteer fire companies, but it is impressive to see that both of these companies have recently increased membership in spite of the national trend of drastic declines in volunteer service. This accomplishment should be recognized, and continued effort should be directed toward volunteer recruitment and retention efforts.

There are two volunteer fire companies in Wallingford. The North Farms Volunteer Fire Department, Inc., Company 7, provides services to the northeast section of the town. The East Wallingford Volunteer Fire Department, Inc., Company 8, provides services to the southeast section of town. They also respond to major incidents throughout the community when needed. Both departments have a wide range of services that the members provide.

In addition to being an integral part of the WFD, the two volunteer fire companies are organized as non-profit 501(c)3 corporations and conduct fundraising and social activities that support their respective memberships. They also use their funds to purchase firefighting and rescue equipment that is donated to the town.

The volunteer members have certifications and qualifications as outlined in the following charts.

	Company 7	Company 8	Total
Fire and EMS responders	16	16	32
EMS Only responders	4	5	9
Nonresponding (in training)	3	3	6

FIGURE III-5: VOLUNTEER STAFF EMS CERTIFICATIONS

Certification	# Staff Certified
Firefighter 1	15
Firefighter 2	15
Firefighter 3	3
Fire Officer 1	2
Fire Officer 2	2
Fire Instructor 1	6
Fire Instructor 2	2

FIGURE III-6: VOLUNTEER STAFF FIREFIGHTING CERTIFICATIONS

In addition to the volunteer fire companies, the town has a volunteer Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) of approximately 20 members. A local Community Emergency Response

Team (CERT) is composed of volunteer citizens trained in disaster preparedness and basic emergency response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations, to support professional responders during major emergencies. Their primary role is to assist their neighbors and community in the immediate aftermath of a disaster when professional emergency services may be overwhelmed or delayed, while also participating in non-emergency projects to improve community safety. Within the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Service Department's organizational structure, the CERT team operates under the oversight of the deputy emergency management director. A goal of the department is to have the CERT team assist with providing firefighter rest and rehabilitation services during fires and other major events.

The MRI team learned that there is more unity in the volunteer companies and the full-time staff today than there has been in the past few years. During the meetings with the volunteers, there was some very notable frustration with the overall operations between the career and volunteer divisions; however, it was equally noted that there has been a great improvement since Chief Buck took over.

The high standard of care and level of service provided by the career and volunteer personnel is a source of great organizational pride. Town residents who serve on the volunteer companies are providing a valuable service to the community. Many of the volunteer members have unique skill sets that they believe are often overlooked, which creates a source of frustration. This concern should be considered and addressed by the administration of the WFD.

The department operates three stations as listed below:

- **Fire Headquarters, located at 75 Masonic Ave**, houses all the administrative offices, training areas, living quarters for the on-duty personnel, and equipment and apparatus.
- **Company 1, located at 95 North Main Street,** houses a single staffed engine.
- **Company 7, located at 846 North Farms Road**, houses a 24/7 career staff and the North Farms Volunteer Fire Company.
- **Company 8, located at** 2 Kondracki Lane, houses Company 8 apparatus.

The Wallingford Fire & Emergency Services Department operates the following frontline apparatus:

- Five engines (pumpers)
- One 75’ quint[14]
- One 100’ aerial ladder
- One brush truck
- One rescue
- Two tankers
- Three ambulances
- One paramedic intercept unit
- One boat
- Five command/support/utility vehicles



Based on our experience, this fleet represents a suitable frontline apparatus set for the Town of Wallingford and matches the resources provided to similar departments that we have evaluated. In addition to the front line fleet, the department maintains several reserve pumpers and ambulances.

Fire apparatus and ambulances are included in the town’s capital improvement plan (CIP). The fire department projects its capital replacement needs looking out ten years.

A new fire pumper (engine), two new ambulances, and a new battalion chief command vehicle have been received and will be placed in service in the coming weeks. A new pumper and a new 105’ aerial ladder are on order with an expected delivery in 2027. A new quint is on order with an expected delivery in 2028.

According to the fire department vehicle schedule, dated 6/25/2025, the department’s inventory includes the following:

- Seven (7) engines (pumpers)
- One (1) 75’ quint
- One (1) aerial tower (reserve)
- One (1) aerial ladder
- One (1) rescue pumper
- Two (2) tankers

[14] A quint fire truck (short for "quintuple combination pumper") is a versatile fire apparatus that combines five essential firefighting functions into one vehicle: a **pump**, a **water tank**, **fire hose**, an **aerial ladder**, and **ground ladders**, allowing it to act as both a pumper engine and a ladder truck, ideal for providing flexibility, especially in smaller departments.

- Six (6) ambulances
- One (1) rescue boat and trailer
- One (1) cargo trailer
- One (1) heavy-duty pickup truck with towing capacity (supports the NHASH hazmat team)
- One (1) special operations vehicle
- Eleven cars (11)

It is appropriate for the town to maintain reserve equipment to be placed in service when vehicles are out for maintenance, repair, or are committed to long-term incidents or mutual aid responses. Reserve apparatus can be staffed by recalled personnel during a major incident and should be kept in a fully equipped and at a ready state at all times. WFD currently maintains three (3) reserve pumpers, one (1) reserve aerial ladder, and two (2) reserve ambulances. When the new apparatus is placed in service, the department plans to have three (3) reserve pumpers, one (1) reserve quint, one (1) reserve aerial ladder, and two (2) reserve ambulances. Vehicles that are no longer needed are obsolete, and cannot be maintained cost-effectively, or cannot be staffed are disposed of in accordance with town policy.

The department provides EMS services to the community at the advanced life support (ALS)/paramedic transport level. The three (3) ambulances are staffed with basic life support (BLS) and EMTs, and one or more paramedics are assigned to fire apparatus or the paramedic intercept vehicle.

The WFD is an all-hazards response agency that responds to a wide range of emergency incidents and requests for assistance each year from within the town. The fire and emergency services department is trained to operate at the hazardous materials operations level.

Community Growth and Development

The town will be seeing an increase in development with a new planning and zoning regulation passed earlier this year that will allow multi-housing units in ten zones along the Route 5 corridor. At the time of research for this document, there were four large-scale projects that were in the approval process or had been approved, and a fifth was being explored by the state.

The schools and the board of education are considering the construction of a new high school that would combine the two existing high schools. Currently, there are two international

companies that have doubled their footprint. The Yale New Haven Health and Hartford Health Care consortium is building a proton generator cancer treatment center.

Every one of these projects will have a direct impact on the WFD operations from the fire marshal's office through inspectional service and code compliance to the fire and EMS divisions with service and emergency response demands during construction and after occupancy.

Address	# of Units
55 Kondracki Lane	71
100 South Cherry St	68
Choate Boat House property (Lake Street)	100-200 Senior Affordable
920 South Colony	200 plus
State exploring Train station lot for housing	Unknown

FIGURE III-7: NEW RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS IN WALLINGFORD

Anticipating and planning for this growth is essential for the town and WFD to continue to provide the community with the desired level of emergency services. Based upon what has been developed and future potential development, it is reasonable to anticipate that growth will impact the delivery of fire and EMS services in the Town of Wallingford. The impact will include, but not be limited to:

- Increase in the number of fire and EMS incidents (especially for senior housing)
- Increased traffic, with the potential for increased motor vehicle crashes and delayed emergency responses due to traffic congestion
- Increased fire marshal services for plan reviews, permits, and inspections
- Increased responses for specialized industrial and health care hazards

Community Risk Profile

A community risk assessment is a comprehensive process to identify the hazards, risks, fire, and life safety problems, and the demographic characteristics of those at risk in a community. In each community, there are numerous hazards and risks to consider. For each hazard, there are many possible scenarios and potential incidents that could be encountered depending on the timing, magnitude, and location of the hazard or incident. A thorough risk analysis provides insight into

the worst fire and life safety problems and the people who are affected. The analysis results create the foundation for developing risk-reduction and community education programs.

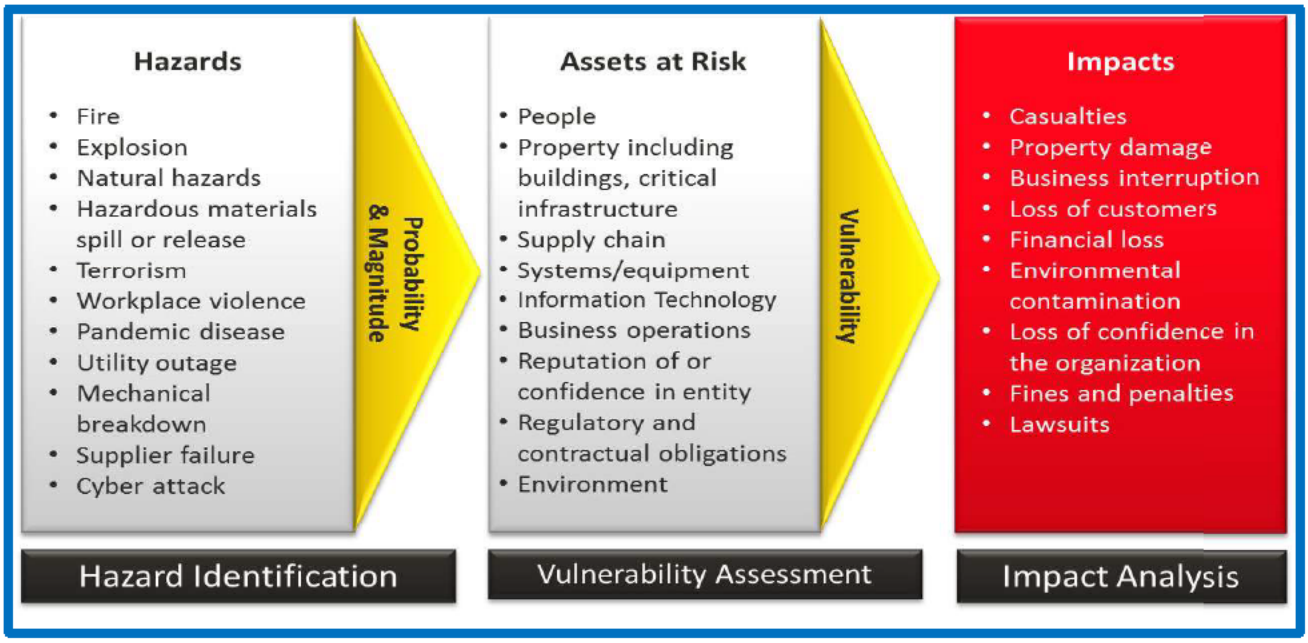
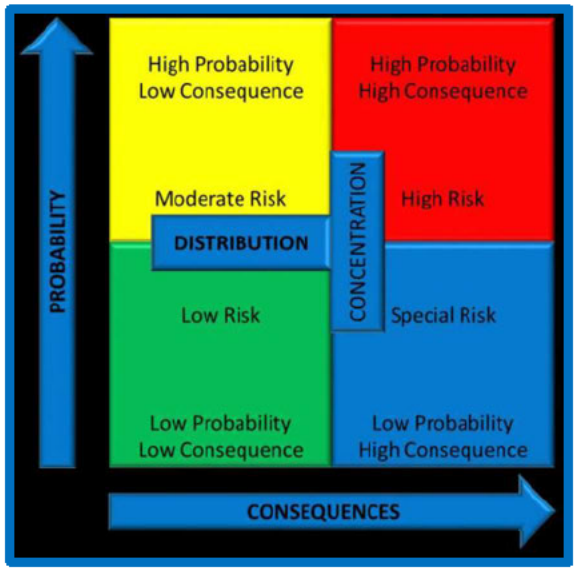


FIGURE III-8 RISK ANALYSIS & EXPECTED IMPACTS



In performing a risk assessment, a community determines which hazards may occur, how often they are likely to occur, and the potential impact of that hazard. The South Central Regional Council of Governments 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan Update[15] addresses 16 specific natural hazards that could impact Wallingford, categorized as atmospheric, hydrologic, geologic, and "other". The town also faces human-caused threats such as fire, hazardous materials releases, and transportation incidents. WFD plays a major role in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from these natural and technological events.

FIGURE III-9: FIRE PROBABILITY AND CONSEQUENCES MATRIX
Image credit: Commission on Fire Accreditation International

[15] https://scrcog.org/regional-planning/regional-hazard-mitigation/

The fire chief serves as the town's emergency management director, is responsible for the town's emergency operations plan (EOP), and for coordinating disaster planning, response, and recovery.

As with most communities, the greatest fire safety concern in Wallingford is the potential life loss in fires that occur in non-sprinklered, single- and multi-family residential dwellings during sleeping hours, which is consistent with national experience. These fires are fueled by new "lightweight" construction and more flammable synthetic home contents. The time to escape a house fire has dwindled from about 17 minutes, 20 years ago, to three to five minutes today. This poses a severe risk not only to occupants but also to firefighters, as they now have less time to do their job and save residents' lives and property.

Aging Population: Connecticut is one of the nation's oldest states, with older adults making up a substantial part of its population, a trend mirrored in towns like Wallingford. The town features a blend of young professionals and retirees, with a notable segment of its population being older adults (e.g., 10% in the 60-69 range, plus 70+ and 80+ groups). While specific data varies, Wallingford's median age (around 40.3) places it within the state's aging demographic profile.

An aging population impacts the town's fire and emergency services in several ways:

- Increased demand for EMS responses.
- Older residents who opt to "age in place" in their existing homes have difficulty self-evacuating in the event of a fire. Cooking is a leading cause of home fires, injuries, and deaths. They may live in older homes with deteriorating electrical and heating systems and may have difficulty in maintaining smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.
- An aging population invariably results in more senior housing, assisted living, and skilled nursing facilities.

Wallingford presents a unique mix of challenges and hazards that must be protected by its fire and emergency services department. Although the town has moderate residential areas, it is not just a typical bedroom community. It has a moderate density concentration of commercial and industrial occupancies.

Target hazards are defined as significant hazards; those that can strain the fire department's response capability. Target hazards can include hospitals, schools, houses of worship, storage facilities, or manufacturing plants.

As part of the MRI project team's tour of the community, it was noted that there are several high-level target hazards that the department must be able to respond to and properly mitigate an incident at. Some of these high-hazard occupancies are listed below:



- Silversmith Park – Old Mill
- BYK
- Rail Yard
- Commercial carrier on all roads
- Tank Farms at Roehm Property
- Oakdale (Capacity of 6500)
- Fertilizer Plant
- Amazon Distribution Center

Fortunately, many of these commercial and industrial structures are equipped throughout with complete automatic fire suppression (sprinkler) systems, which considerably reduce the overall risk of these structures. Automatic sprinklers are highly effective and reliable elements of total system designs for fire protection in buildings. They save lives and property, producing large reductions in the number of deaths per thousand fires, average direct property damage per fire, and they especially reduce the likelihood of a fire with large loss of life or large property loss. Automatic sprinklers contain fires much more quickly, often more effectively, and with less damage than firefighters do. No fire safety improvement strategy has as much documented life safety effectiveness as automatic fire sprinklers because they extinguish the fire, or at a minimum, hold it in check and prevent flashover until the arrival of the fire department.

Automatic fire sprinklers extend the window of opportunity for building occupants to escape using normal means of egress.

Newer multi-family residential/apartment complexes are usually protected by fire suppression and detection systems. However, the regular maintenance and inspection of these systems is essential to ensuring their proper operation.

Buildings more than three stories in height pose a special risk in an emergency. Fires on higher floors may require the use of ladder trucks to deliver water into a building that does not have an internal fire standpipe system in place. For victims trapped on higher floors, a ladder truck may be their only option for escape. Large area buildings, sometimes referred to as horizontal high rises, such as warehouses, malls, and large "big box" stores, require greater volumes of water for firefighting and require more firefighters to advance hose lines long distances into the building. They also present challenges for ventilation, smoke removal, search and rescue, and firefighter orientation and accountability.

Aggressive adoption and enforcement of fire and building codes in both new and existing facilities will continue to be critical factors in managing risk throughout Wallingford. Communications regarding major projects need to be kept open and frequent. Any new development projects that are proposed should continue to be sent to the fire department for review and input on fire protection needs and concerns. Ensuring that existing buildings continue to maintain code compliance is also an important component of a community's overall fire protection system.

In the future, the Town of Wallingford is expected to experience some steady, moderate growth and development. While this development will have a definitive impact on the WFD, the exact amount is difficult to quantitatively and accurately predict. Increased development of any type will mean an increase in the number of people living, working, and traveling within the area. Each of these will reasonably be expected to result in an increased number of requests for services from the fire and emergency services department. They can also impact response times through increased traffic and congestion.

It is likely the most significant increase in requests for emergency services will be EMS-related. More people simply increase the number of medical emergencies that occur. It would not be unreasonable to expect that the increase in EMS incidents would be proportional to the increase in population; however, that is not always the case. Although many factors can ultimately impact the requests for service, such as ages or socio-economic status of new residents, or an aging

population, it could reasonably be anticipated that an increase in population, along with potential increases in employment from any significant commercial development, would translate into an increase in emergency medical incidents.

The above information is intended to provide a community "snapshot" of the Town of Wallingford. It is not intended to be all-inclusive or comprehensive. For the town's governing body and fire department leadership, it serves to put the community and its associated hazards and risks into some context as the fire department works to carry out the recommendations of this study and implement their long-range plans. Looking ahead, as it develops a more in-depth risk management plan, that assessment should include:

- Clearly identify and classify the town's current risks.
- Place the risks in context with the fire department's current operational capabilities and procedures.
- Reflect what the town council feels is an acceptable level of risk for the Town of Wallingford.
- Implement short- and long-range plans based upon a desire to reduce those risks and/or improve service delivery levels.

Overall, the MRI project team found that Wallingford is a very diverse community and contains many hazards with a combination of residential, educational, and commercial properties; aging buildings; aging population; waterways and dams; limited access highways (including a major interstate) and rail line; industrial areas with chemical processes; one rehabilitation hospital; a college preparatory and boarding school; and multiple places of assembly.

CHAPTER IV – DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS

The main components of the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department are: fire administration, suppression operations, emergency medical services (EMS) operations, fire prevention (fire marshal), and training. The fire chief's 2024 annual report provides important information on the department and the services provided to the community.

The department is supported by one executive secretary, two (2) senior clerks, and one (1) part-time EMS billing clerk.

Suppression and EMS Operations

The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department operates with a total of 90 full-time employees (FTEs), one (1) part-time employee, and approximately 40 volunteers. The level of service demand includes approximately 8,000 calls for service, with approximately 80 percent being EMS-related responses. The call volume breakdown for 2024 and 2025 is provided below. Fire-related responses have decreased between 2024 and 2025, while EMS responses have increased by 4.5%. The department's overall response activity has increased by 2.3%.

Incident Type	2024		2025		
	# Responses	% Responses	# Responses	% Responses	% Change
Fires	148	1.9%	99	1.1%	-33.1%
EMS	6434	82.0%	6722	83.8%	4.5%
Explosion/O-P[16]	8	0.1%	6	0.1%	-25.0%
False Alarm	715	9.1%	713	8.0%	-0.3%
Service Calls	265	3.4%	236	2.7%	-10.9%
Hazmat/Hazardous Condition	123	1.6%	115	1.3%	-6.5%
Good Intent	122	1.6%	114	1.3%	-6.6%
Other	28	0.4%	16	0.2%	-42.9%
TOTAL	**7843**	**100.0%**	**8021**	**100.0%**	**2.3%**

FIGURE IV-1: 2024-2025 RESPONSE STATISTICS FOR THE WALLINGFORD FIRE DEPARTMENT

[16] O-P: Overpressure refers to incidents involving high-pressure situations (air, gas, steam, or liquid) where there is **no ensuing fire**.

Three of the four fire stations are staffed 24/7 with career personnel operating 24 hours on/48 hours off/24 hours on/96 hours off shift rotation, which is an average work week of 42 hours per week. Those stations are:

- Fire Headquarters, 75 Masonic Ave., staffed with a 4-member engine (lieutenant and 3 firefighters, of which at least one is a paramedic), 3-member ladder (lieutenant and 2 firefighters), a shift commander (battalion chief), an EMS lieutenant (daytime Monday through Friday), and a BLS ambulance staffed with two (2) emergency medical technicians (EMTs).

- Company 1, 95 North Main St., staffed with a 3-member engine (lieutenant and 2 firefighters) and a peak period (Mon-Friday 8 am-4 pm) BLS ambulance with two (2) EMTs.

- North Farms, 846 North Farms Rd., staffed with a 3-member engine and a BLS ambulance staffed with two (2) EMTs (the station is shared with Company 7, also known as the North Farms Volunteer Fire Department).

Note: The station at 2 Kondracki Lane is not staffed. It is operated by Company 8, also known as the East Wallingford Volunteer Fire Department.

The volunteer fire companies are dispatched for fire and EMS incidents within their respective districts and also respond to working fires and other major incidents throughout the town. The North Farms Volunteer Fire Department (Company 7) operates an engine, rescue, and a tanker, and the East Wallingford Volunteer Fire Department (Company 8) operates an engine, squad, and a tanker.

The WFD has mutual aid agreements with surrounding towns. Primary aiding agencies are Meriden, Hamden, and North Haven. The Meriden Fire Department provides the automatic response of a rapid intervention team (RIT) for firefighter safety and rescue when a structure fire occurs in Wallingford. Additional support is called in from other surrounding communities as needed. Examples of required additional support include large building fires, fires at target hazards, conflagrations (multiple buildings on fire), tankers when an incident occurs in the non-hydrant areas of Wallingford, multiple simultaneous incidents, hazardous materials incidents, and mass casualty incidents.

In the event of an incident that overwhelms the immediate local and mutual aid resources, the incident commander can request mobilization of the New Haven County Task Force through the Statewide Fire Service Disaster Response Plan.

The department also responds to technical rescue incidents such as vehicle extrication, high-angle rescue/technical rope rescue, and hazardous material response. The department has 19 hazardous material technicians and is a member of the New Haven Special Hazards Team (NHASH). These additional responsibilities, while not unusual in the fire service, can also challenge the department regarding staffing and operational capability. However, as with fire suppression, additional support can be provided by mutual aid partners as well as the Connecticut Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team Task Force 1 (CT-TF1).

In addition to local planning and needs assessments, the department can be guided by various standards and guiding documents. The primary voluntary standard for fire department operations is *NFPA 1750, Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Services, Special Operations, and Fire Prevention Activities*[17].

The MRI project team observed that the lack of dedicated and consistent three-firefighter staffing of apparatus has a detrimental impact on daily operations. This most often occurs when one of the assigned paramedics on a three-person engine company or ladder company must transport a patient to a local hospital. This drops the unit down to an in-service staffing of two personnel. **The MRI project team believes that, considering the target hazards, accelerated fire growth potential, and risk present in Wallingford, this is a practice that reduces operational safety and crew capability.** In 2025, there were 1,749 patient transports that that required an engine company paramedic to treat and accompany a patient to the hospital. The "turn around" time (travel time to the hospital, time transferring the patient, and return trip) for the ambulance can average one hour or more. Multiple studies have shown the detrimental impact of two-person staffing levels on suppression apparatus in support of department operations. Based on the number of ALS transports with a minimum one-hour turn-around time, an engine or ladder company was staffed with only two personnel a minimum of 20% of the year.

EMS operations are the primary workload of the Wallingford Fire Department, responding to 6,722 calls for service, or 83.8% of annual call volume. Currently, the department operates two dedicated basic life support (BLS) level ambulances 24/7 and one peak period staffed ambulance Monday-Friday from 0800-1600. Advanced life support (ALS) care is provided by the paramedic assigned to an engine or by the EMS lieutenant[18] if on duty. Based on data provided by the department, in 2025, 6,305 patients were transported to area hospitals, with 28% provided with ALS care and 72% receiving BLS care. 417 EMS responses (6.2% of all EMS responses) resulted in treatment/no transport or no treatment/no transport. The town collects nearly $2.5 million in

[17] www.nfpa.org/1750
[18] This position is being reclassified as "Medical and Safety Officer".

EMS billing revenue through its third-party billing service. The current payer mix for insurance reimbursements is 60% Medicare/Medicaid and 40% private insurance. The town and department should consider transitioning the demand staffed ambulance to a full-time 24/7 ALS unit based on a needs assessment, increasing level of service demand, and potential revenue offsets. This transition could be done gradually by expanding the hours of service based on actual demand. For example, weekday coverage hours could initially be expanded to 0800-1800.

One source of significant demand for EMS services comes from two large skilled nursing facilities and elderly housing complexes located near fire headquarters on Masonic Avenue, which houses only one ambulance. Consideration should be given, based on call volume/needs assessment, easily done through heat mapping, to optimally position staffed ambulances or additional ambulance coverage. This analysis should include the possibility of reacquiring the Cook Hill Station to use as a location for an additional ambulance

Quality assurance (QA) reviews of all ALS calls are performed by the EMS lieutenant. Every critical call has an in-person "hot wash" review to evaluate crew performance, identify lessons learned, and institute remedial action if necessary. Hartford HealthCare/MidState Medical Center in Meriden is the department's primary medical resource hospital and provides medical control services and oversight of the QA process. The EMS lieutenant is responsible for coordinating continuing education for the EMTs and paramedics.

WFD is one of the few EMS agencies in Connecticut to be certified to perform rapid sequence intubation (RSI), a laudable achievement. RSI is a critical, fast-acting procedure to secure a patient's airway in emergencies by giving sedation and paralysis drugs to induce immediate unconsciousness and muscle relaxation, allowing for a tube to be placed in the windpipe (intubation) to control breathing, especially for those with severe injuries or respiratory failure.

WFD has prepared for mass casualty incidents (MCI) and active shooter/hostile event responses (ASHER). Each engine company is equipped with an MCI kit and ASHER tactical gear. However, it has been several years since the department participated in a full-scale ASHER exercise with the police department. MRI was not able to determine when the last regional MCI training or exercise was held.

The greatest percentage of ambulance patients are transported to the MidState Medical Center emergency department in Meriden. MidState is a primary stroke center; the nearest Level 1 trauma centers are Yale-New Haven Hospital and Hartford Hospital. Because of Wallingford's proximity to area hospitals, there are few incidents that warrant the use of the Hartford

HealthCare LIFE STAR medical helicopter service to treat and transport patients from an incident scene in Wallingford.

Training and Professional Development (see Strategic Recommendation S-5)

One of the most critical aspects of a fire and EMS department's success is training. Training should be conducted routinely, covering all areas of the department's operational mission. For the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department, this includes but is not limited to: fire suppression, technical rescue, and EMS. There are many standards and regulations that can help guide a department's training program. These include department SOP's/SOG's, best practices, regulations, and statutes. For example, OSHA 1901.156, Fire Brigades, is mandatory for fire departments in Connecticut. The regulation establishes mandatory training, education, personal protective equipment (PPE), and physical capabilities. It is important to note that these are considered minimums and that the regulations are under review and will likely have more robust and stringent requirements. Examples of other OSHA regulations are: Bloodborne Pathogens Training (29 CFR 1910.1030), Hazardous Materials Training (29 CFR 1910.120, and Confined Space Training (29 CFR 1910.146). In addition, firefighting personnel, or those who may need to wear a respirator in the performance of their duties are required to complete additional training such as, a review of the respiratory protection standard, self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) or respirator refresher and user competency training, SCBA/respirator fit testing (29 CFR 1910.134), and structural firefighting training (29 CFR 1910.156) for firefighting personnel.

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards contain numerous recommendations for training on various topics, such as a requirement for a minimum of 24 hours of structural firefighting training annually for each fire department member. There are obviously more skills and training requirements needed on the local level that should be performed initially and recurrently such as: electrical safety, fall protection, hand and power tool training, hazmat, chainsaw operations, personnel protective equipment, and high-angle and below-grade technical rescue. On the EMS side of operations, the training programs and requirements are primarily driven by state EMS protocols and the mandatory nature of continuing education and recertification requirements for various levels of practitioners.

The State of Connecticut has no continuing education or recertification requirement for firefighter training but does for EMS and local fire marshals. This is where the state falls behind in comparison to recertification and continuing education for police officers. However, firefighters have a thirst for knowledge, will be more confident, and will perform in a safer

manner if they are well trained. When training is increased, injuries decrease. As with all other fire department operations, there must be consistency in how the training is conducted.

Training documentation is a necessity. In the event of significant injury or death, initial investigations will focus heavily on training documentation. Documentation begins with the development of a training program.

The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department operates a robust fire and EMS training program. The WFD training program is administered by the deputy fire chief of training and EMS, who develops a quarterly training plan that sets forth the goals and expectations that are to be accomplished. The plan ensures that OSHA training requirements are met and that EMS-certified personnel meet their required continuing education hours. The training encompasses all hazards and includes hazardous materials training, technical rescue, and a wide range of firefighting and rescue subjects, techniques, and evolutions. The plan also takes into consideration seasonal needs. For example, ice rescue training and many indoor classes and drills are scheduled during the cold weather months.

WFD has a modern training facility that is equipped to provide a wide range of fire training evolutions, including live burns and technical rescue.

Live fire training in accordance with NFPA 1400, *Standard on Fire Service Training*, is held twice per year by holding over a shift at the end of their 24-hour duty tour. This ensures that training can continue in the event that some on-duty personnel are called away for emergencies.

EMS training and certification must comply with requirements established by the Connecticut Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS). EMTs and paramedics must maintain their certifications by meeting the requirements for continuing education. In addition, the department's EMS medical director may require additional remedial training based on patient outcomes identified during quality assurance (QA) case reviews. The department's medical resource hospitals (Hartford Health/Care Midstate Medical Center and Yale/New Haven Hospital) require that paramedics and EMTs meet the continuing education requirements required by the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians.[19] EMTs are required to obtain 40 hours of continuing education every two years, and paramedics are required to obtain 60 hours of continuing education every two years.

Training is led by the deputy chief for training and EMS, the EMS lieutenant, or a battalion chief or lieutenant who is a certified fire instructor.

[19] https://www.nremt.org/

Once completed, training sessions are documented in the department's ESO fire department management software application.

One challenge faced by the department is the growing call volume. The ability to take companies out of service to conduct training appears to be limited, therefore impacting on the quality of training being delivered and completed. Along with live fire training, the department should perform a needs assessment to evaluate conducting some training off duty. This unfortunately comes with a budgetary impact as members off duty must be paid overtime to participate in the training.

The MRI project team learned of the challenges associated with new paramedic and new firefighter training and orientation. The main concern that was identified was the time needed for new firefighters to be fully oriented and cleared for shift work. Whenever possible, the department sends new firefighter recruits to the Connecticut Fire Academy or a regional fire school. Unfortunately, the state fire academy only runs a recruit school two times per year.

The department provided documentation illustrating its current new hire orientation program, including attendance at the Connecticut Fire Academy, as well as other in-house and outside training opportunities. The department does an excellent job recruiting, training, and providing classes for officers, as these two sections received either full or majority credit at the last ISO Public Protection Classification (PPC) review. However, there is room for improvement in various categories such as driver training, hazardous materials, structure fire-related subjects, and pre-incident planning.

Administration

The fire chief is directly supported by two (2) deputy fire chiefs. One deputy chief is responsible for operations, and one deputy chief is responsible for training and EMS. While both operate with the same level of authority under the chief, this division of duties provides a structure that promotes effective and efficient management of the department's day to day operations.

It is imperative that the chief and deputy chiefs effectively communicate policies, rules, and regulations to all staff. This is necessary so that all department personnel work collectively towards established goals and objectives. It is also important that this communication flow be reversed with members reporting issues or needs for them to effectively do their jobs, up the chain of command. As part of this process, the administration should conduct staff meetings with the battalion chiefs on a regular schedule. This meeting could include volunteer fire company leadership, but these meetings could also be held individually.

The department operates with several civilian administrative positions that support the command staff and the department. These civilian administrative personnel are responsible for a variety of assignments and include the following positions: executive secretary to the chief, a senior clerk, and a part-time EMS billing clerk.

While considered a segment of the administration, the fire marshal's office is covered in a separate section of this report. Although under the fire department organizational structure, the fire marshal operates under separate statutory authority [20].

Fiscal Operations (see Strategic Recommendations S-2 and S-3)

Emergency services budgets are more than the dollar amount allocated for the operation of the various departments. The budgets are documents that reflect the goals and objectives that the town and the fire department have established for the delivery of services to the community. The budgets should be used as a planning tool by the department and its members and should represent the needs of the department to serve the public properly and safely.

A review of WFD's annual operating budget shows that it was funded for fiscal year 2025 at $9,421,161.00 for salary and wages and an additional $1,290,145.00 in operating and maintenance. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the fire department's operating budget is dedicated to personnel costs. This is consistent with the 90% for personnel costs seen in most career fire departments. However, employee benefits (including pension contributions) are not shown in the fire department budget.

The department has also been approved to spend $308,095.00 on fire and EMS capital purchases. The department utilizes a traditional line-item budget to identify and track funding and expenses. The budget is in line with the appropriations provided to other similarly sized fire rescue organizations that we have worked with.

Ambulance revenues are collected by a third-party billing service for a percentage fee (currently 6%) of what is collected. Ambulance billing is a complex endeavor due to Medicare and Medicaid regulations and the myriad of private insurance companies. It is cost-effective to contract for ambulance billing services. Ambulance revenue is returned to the general fund.

The town currently has no "write-off" policy for ambulance bad debt. According to fire department personnel, approximately $250,000 of bad debt has accumulated since 2016. Bad

[20] See C.G.S. Chapter 541 (Building, Demolition, and Fire Codes); C.G.S. §29-291a-4a (role of local fire marshals); and RCSA Title 29, §29-298-3 (fire code inspector certification and roles)

debt can include the difference between amount billed and the amount paid by a private insurer or non-payment by uninsured patients.

The town currently does "balance billing" (also known as surprise billing), which is the difference between what an insurance company allows and what the patient owes. Balance billing may be at risk in the future if Congress adds ground ambulance transportation to the services included in the "No Surprises Act" or if the state prohibits balance billing.

Grants (see Strategic Recommendation S-2)

There are several federal, state, and private grants available for fire departments and communities to consider for supplementing their budgets. If successful in receiving a grant award, most departments can acquire equipment, training, and programs that they would not be able to achieve through the normal budget process. Though the process can be difficult and time-consuming, the outcomes can be very beneficial to the fire department.

While the economic challenges of the last decade and a half have had an impact on grants from private entities and foundations, fortunately, the federal grant programs targeted to the fire service, the Assistance to Fire Firefighters Grants (AFG) for equipment, the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants for personnel, and the Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Grants for fire prevention and public fire education programs, continue to be funded, although not anywhere near their authorized levels.

The AFG program provides financial assistance directly to fire departments to enhance their capabilities with respect to fire and fire-related hazards. AFG supports fire departments that lack the tools and resources necessary to more effectively protect the life and safety of the public and their emergency response personnel, with respect to fire and all other hazards. Since 2001, AFG has helped firefighters and other first responders obtain critically needed equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles, training, and other resources needed to protect the public and emergency personnel from fire and related hazards.

The goal of the SAFER grants is to enhance a fire department's ability to comply with staffing, response, and operational standards established by NFPA and OSHA (NFPA 1750 and OSHA 1910.134). Specifically, SAFER funds assist the fire department in increasing its staffing and deployment capabilities to respond to emergencies whenever they may occur. SAFER grants are awarded to departments to hire career personnel and strengthen the recruitment and retention

of volunteer/call personnel. However, a department cannot apply for both grant categories in the same year.

FP&S grants support projects that enhance the safety of the public and firefighters from fire and related hazards. The primary goal is to target high-risk populations and mitigate high incidences of death and injury.

There are several other grants available to fire departments for various purposes. Some grants that may be available to the WFD are the Fireman's Fund Heritage Grants, Factory Mutual grants for fire investigation, and Wal-Mart community grants. Other large chains, such as Home Depot and Lowe's, are frequently willing to provide funding and/or enter partnerships for specific projects. The key to success at this level is finding grants for which the department may be eligible and ensuring that the application is tailored to the grant program's priorities.

Organizational Policies and Standard Operating Procedures/Guidelines (SOPS/SOGS)

The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department maintains a robust set of policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs). The categories include administration, operations, EMS, fire dispatch, special operations, NHASH, emergency operations center, exposure control and protection, and training. The SOP's are well organized, but many have not been reviewed or updated for five years or more.

Current fire service best practice distinguishes between a policy, an SOP, and an SOG.

- A policy is a guiding principle or rule that sets the organizational expectation. It states "what" is to be done and "why", but not necessarily "how".
    - Examples: sexual harassment policy, substance abuse policy, uniform policy
- An SOP is a specific set of written instructions that document a routine or repetitive activity followed by an organization. It details "how" to do something.
    - Examples: **Controlled Substance Exchange:** "At shift change, the oncoming and off-going paramedic must visually inspect and sign for the narcotics."; **Requesting Leave:** "Forms must be submitted 48 hours in advance."; **Decontamination of Equipment:** "Equipment must be soaked in solution X for 10 minutes."
- An SOG is a written operational directive that provides a standard course of action but allows for flexibility based on the changing conditions of an emergency scene.
    - Examples: **Residential Fire Attack:** "The first arriving engine *should* secure a water supply and advance a hose line to the front door." (However, if the hydrant is blocked or there is a rescue to be made at a window, the officer can deviate from

this guideline); **Highway Safety:** "Apparatus *should* be positioned to block traffic." (But the specific angle depends on the road geometry).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation IV-1: ***The WFD should revise the policy and SOP manual to include SOGs. Many of the existing SOPs should be converted to SOGs. Additional policies, SOPs, or SOGs should be added based on current standards, best practices, technology, and community conditions, and obsolete policies and SOPs should be retired. Policies, SOPs, and SOGs should be reviewed and updated no less than every three (3) years. More frequent updating should occur when an incident after-action report or a safety committee recommendation identifies a problem or weakness with an existing policy, SOP, or SOG (or the lack of an appropriate policy, SOP, or SOG). The department's training should be aligned with the most current policies, SOPs, and SOGs. Town policies that impact the department should be included in the policy, SOP, and SOG manual.***

Recommendation IV-2: ***The WFD should encourage its members to attend outside training conducted by various institutions and programs, such as the National Fire Academy, or attendance at conferences and workshops, such as the Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC).***

Recommendation IV-3: ***The training site should be operated in accordance with NFPA 1400, Standard on Fire Service Training (2026 edition). The department should develop a maintenance and improvement plan for the site. Major upgrades or repairs should be included in the department's capital improvement plan (CIP).***

Recommendation IV-4: ***The WFD should develop a training and mentoring program, delivered in house, for lieutenants. This would help provide clarity and direction for current and new lieutenants as to the responsibilities required of a battalion chief, should they either act in that capacity or aspire to the position through promotional opportunities.***

Recommendation IV-5: ***All officers should have one or more administrative duties/responsibilities to assist the command staff with the department's overall management, in addition to their normal emergency scene operational duties and station management responsibilities.***

Recommendation IV-6: ***Working in close consultation with the town's legal counsel and human resources department, the WFD should ensure that all policies, SOPs, and SOGs meet and are consistent with applicable federal and state laws and regulations, town ordinances, bylaws, and policies. This would include such topics as handling freedom of information requests, and human resources related issues such as Family Medical Leave Act, sexual harassment, equal employment opportunity (EEO), diversity, privacy, use of social media, media relations, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).***

Recommendation IV-7: ***The WFD should consider the implementation of a process to actively seek feedback from "customers" to whom the department has provided service, such as property owners and EMS patients. A formal customer satisfaction online or hard-copy (via USPS) survey instrument could be sent to every customer (or a statistically valid and reliable sampling or percentage of those the department has served). Respondents should be afforded the opportunity to receive a personal response (via telephone or in-person) from the department to address any concerns. Positive responses should be shared (without attribution) with the department. Negative responses could inform the need for additional training, policies, SOPs, or SOGs.***

Recommendation IV-8: ***The WFD should develop and implement more interagency training with town departments and mutual aid partners. Of specific note is training for both emergency communications center personnel and FD line personnel to enhance knowledge and perspective of both agencies' roles and how they work together. This can be accomplished by having the shift commanders provide a ride along with communications personnel and having FD personnel spend some time in the communications center observing their operation.***

Recommendation IV-9: ***The WFD should work to develop and implement an internal risk management plan following the recommendations of NFPA 1500, Standard for a Fire department Occupational Safety and Health Program, and NFPA 1250, Recommended Practice in Fire and Emergency Services Organization Risk Management.***

Recommendation IV-10: ***The town, in collaboration with its auditor, should develop an ambulance "bad-debt" write-off policy that is aligned with generally accepted municipal accounting practices. A debt forgiveness hardship policy should be compliant with Medicare/Medicaid regulations.***

CHAPTER V - EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

Fire, rescue, and emergency medical services (EMS) form the core of a mission-critical delivery system where, despite EMS now constituting the majority of responses, fire incidents remain a high priority due to the rapid growth and intensity of modern residential fires. To mitigate these risks effectively, departments must assemble an "effective response force" (ERF) within specific benchmarks, such as the NFPA 1750 standard of a four-minute travel time for initial arrival and eight minutes for full staffing. Beyond suppression and medical care, departments must be equipped for a broad spectrum of emergencies—ranging from vehicle crashes to natural disasters—managed through a NIMS-compliant Incident Command System (ICS) that prioritizes safety of firefighters and the public.

During the period 2001-2024, fire incidents in Wallingford have remained relatively stable, while EMS responses have increased by 61 percent. The department experienced a drop in 911 calls during the COVID pandemic, which is similar to what most fire and EMS agencies experienced. 2023 was the peak year with 8,021 fire and EMS responses.



FIGURE V-1: WFD CALL VOLUME

The following charts show the turnout time in minutes and seconds for the career staff and the volunteer staff. Turnout is the period between the initial alerting of an incident and the beginning of travel time in the apparatus to the incident. As expected, travel time for volunteers is longer

than for the career staff because they are frequently responding to the station from their home, workplace, or other activity.

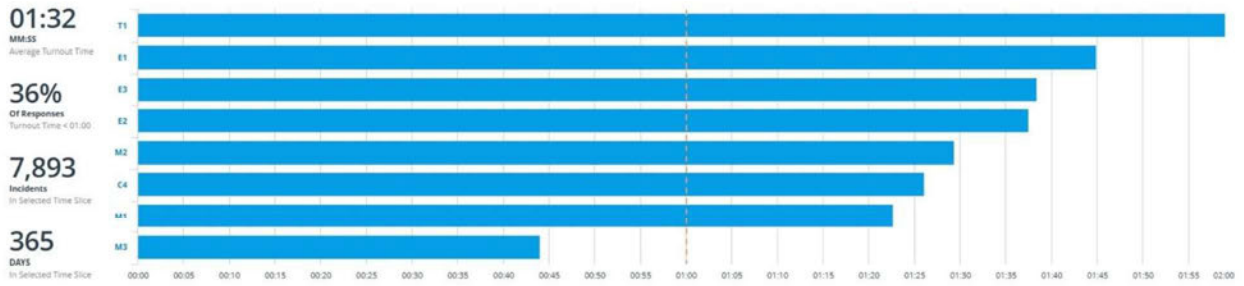


FIGURE V-2: 2024 RESPONSE TIME FOR CAREER STAFF

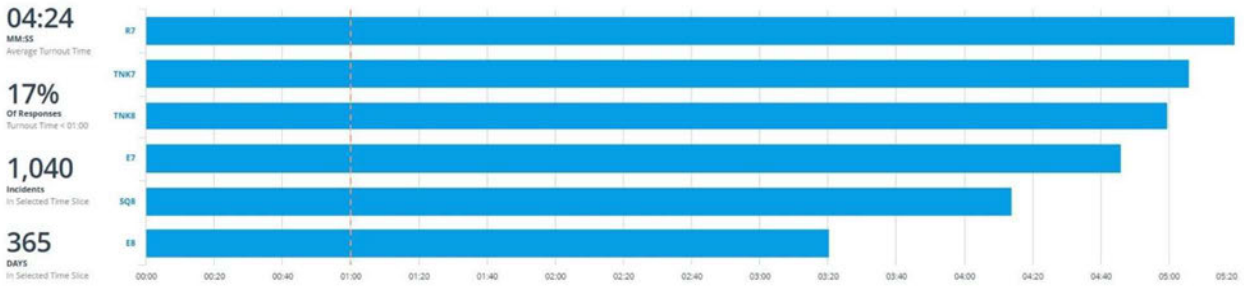


FIGURE V-3: 2024 RESPONSE TIME FOR VOLUNTEER STAFF

Fire Operations

The WFD is equipped and staffed to respond to a wide variety of emergency incidents. Although EMS calls are more prevalent, the department must still be prepared to fulfill its core firefighting mission. As with most communities in the United States, the primary focus of firefighting operations is on fires in residential occupancies (single- and two-family dwellings and multi-family units) due to the high potential for loss of life. Firefighting in commercial occupancies – of which Wallingford has a large number for a town of its size - is important to the economic well-being of the community. Fortunately, however, large commercial occupancies are often equipped with automatic fire suppression systems to reduce risk and damage from fire. Until residential fire sprinkler systems become commonplace as a critical lifesaving feature in homes, the fire department will continue to be the only "front-line" resource available for firefighting and rescue.

Structural firefighting has become far more challenging and dangerous in the last thirty years with the introduction of significant quantities of plastic and foam-based products into homes and

businesses (*e.g.*, furnishings, mattresses, bedding, plumbing, electrical components, home and business electronics, decorative materials, insulation, and structural components). These materials ignite easily, burn quickly, and produce extreme heat and toxic smoke. A fire can easily double in size and intensity every 30 seconds. If firefighters cannot arrive in a timely manner and attack the fire quickly, a strong possibility exists that a dangerous flashover (simultaneous ignition of all combustible materials in a room) will occur. Flashover can occur in as little as five to seven minutes after fire ignition and is one of the most dangerous events that a firefighter can face. When a flashover occurs, initial firefighting forces are generally overwhelmed and will require significantly more resources to affect fire control and extinguishment.

Figure V-4 illustrates the time progression of a fire from inception through flashover. The time versus products of combustion curve shows activation times and effectiveness of residential smoke alarms and sprinklers (approximately one minute), commercial sprinklers (four minutes), flashover (eight to ten minutes), and firefighters applying first water to the fire after notification, dispatch, response, and set up (ten minutes). It also illustrates that the fire department's response time to the fire is one of the only aspects of the timeline that the fire department can exert direct control over. It is also important to keep in mind that once units arrive on the scene, they will need to get set up to commence operations. NFPA recommends that units be able to commence an initial attack within two minutes of arrival, 90% of the time.

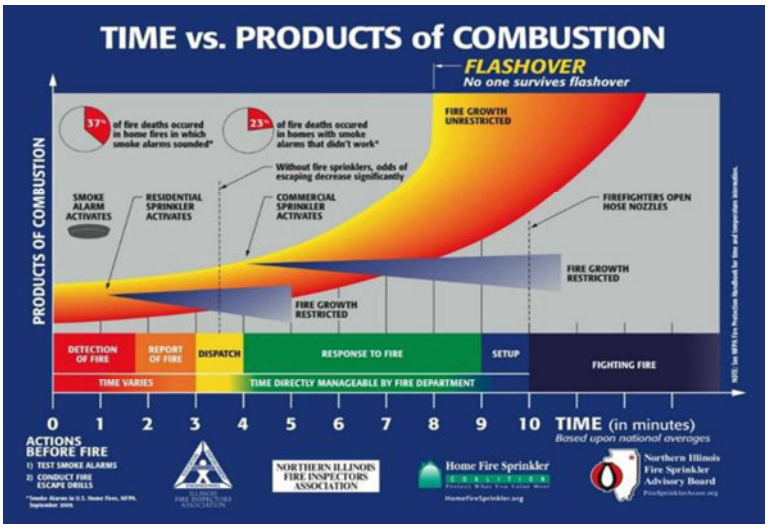


FIGURE V-4:
HOME FIRE TIMELINE CURVE SHOWING ACTIVATION TIMES AND EFFECTIVENESS OF RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLERS (APPROXIMATELY 1 MINUTE), FLASHOVER (3 TO 5 MINUTES) AND FIREFIGHTERS APPLYING FIRST WATER TO THE FIRE AFTER NOTIFICATION, DISPATCH, RESPONSE, AND SET UP (10 MINUTES).
Image credit: Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition

One of the most effective tools the fire department has to assist them with handling fires and other emergencies in commercial and industrial facilities is pre-incident plans. The purpose of a pre-incident planning program is to allow firefighters and EMTs to become familiar with buildings and/or facilities within their response area prior to an emergency, alert them to on-site hazards and risks, and develop a detailed response plan for them that includes specific tactics that will be required to mitigate fires or other emergencies. Lack of an up-to-date pre-incident plan is often attributed as one of the primary contributing factors in large fire losses.

A comprehensive pre-incident plan includes as much data about the building as possible. Information collected for pre-incident plans includes, but is certainly not limited to, data such as:

- the occupancy type
- floor plans/layouts
- building construction type and features
- fire protection systems (sprinkler system, standpipe systems, etc.)
- utility locations
- hazards to firefighters and/or firefighting operations
- special conditions in the building
- apparatus placement plan
- fire flow requirements and/or water supply plan
- forcible entry and ventilation plan

The information contained in pre-incident plans allows firefighters and officers to have a familiarity with the building/facility, its features, characteristics, operations, and hazards, thus enabling them to more effectively, efficiently, and safely conduct firefighting and other emergency operations. Pre-incident plans should be reviewed and updated regularly. They should be tested and validated by table-top exercises and on-site drills. Plans should then be available via a cloud-based system on mobile data terminals (e.g., tablets or iPads) for use by responding units and incident commanders. Emergency dispatchers should also have access to the pre-incident plans.

Guidance on the development of pre-incident plans can be found in NFPA 1660, *Standard for Emergency, Continuity, and Crisis Management: Preparedness, Response, and Recovery*[21] (2024 edition). WFD has done some pre-incident planning on a few of the significant target hazards in the town.

[21] www.nfpa.org/1660

EMS Operations

The citizens of Wallingford enjoy numerous benefits from having a fire department-based EMS system that includes basic and advanced life support care, initial response by on-duty firefighters, and ambulance transport. The **operational and clinical value** of the system includes:

- **Rapid response times:** fire stations are strategically located (geographically distributed) to minimize response times for fires, which translates directly to medical emergencies.
- **Surge capacity (manpower):** critical medical calls (e.g., cardiac arrest, bariatric lifting, complex extrications) often require more than two people. By dispatching an engine company along with an ambulance, an additional 3-4 trained responders can support patient care.
- **ALS response flexibility:** The WFD paramedics are assigned to fire apparatus, and if ALS care is not needed for the patient, they can return to the station and are available for the next call.
- **Continuity of care:** the fire department manages the patient from the 911 call to the hospital door. This eliminates hand-offs between a first responder agency and a separate transport company.
- **All-hazards capability:** firefighters are trained and equipped to work in dangerous environments (highway traffic, collapsed structures, hazmat scenes). A firefighter-paramedic can treat a patient inside a crushed vehicle while their crewmates perform the extrication.

The **economic value** of Wallingford's fire-based EMS system includes:

- **Infrastructure efficiency:** the municipality does not need to build separate EMS stations. The ambulances are housed in existing fire stations, and the system utilizes existing administrative support (HR, payroll, fleet maintenance).
- **Personnel efficiency (dual role):** Because staff are cross trained as firefighter/EMTs or firefighter/paramedics, the same employees fight fires and treat patients. This maximizes the utility of the "standing army" that must be on duty regardless of call volume.
- **Revenue generation:** unlike fire suppression, which is funded almost entirely by tax dollars, EMS transport is a fee-for-service operation. Insurance billing for ambulance transports generates significant revenue that offsets some of the operational costs of the fire department.

There is significant **strategic value** to the current fire-based EMS system:

- **Unified command:** at major incidents (mass casualty events, large fires, disasters), having fire and EMS under a single chain of command simplifies and strengthens communication and logistics.
- **Community trust:** fire departments generally enjoy high public trust. Leveraging this brand can improve community cooperation during medical emergencies.

In 2025, the average response time to EMS incidents was 6 minutes, 45 seconds. 5,240 incidents experienced a response time of less than 8 minutes. Response time is defined as time interval from the receipt of the alarm at the primary public safety answering point (PSAP) to when the first emergency response unit is initiating action or intervening to control the incident[22]. Response time includes alarm handling time, turnout time, and travel time.

NOTE: The response time data that was provided to MRI included the response times for mutual aid ambulances, which is considerably longer than the response times for WFD units. If mutual aid ambulances were removed from the calculation, the average EMS response time for WFD units would be lower.

Factors that impact response time include simultaneous incidents, unit availability based on transport to and turnaround times at local hospitals or medical receiving facilities, and the overall size/square mileage of the community protected. The nature of survival and ultimate patient outcome, especially with trauma related incidents and cardiovascular (cardiac arrest, heart attack, stroke), is predicated on the timeliness of initial patient care and intervention followed by prompt transport.

The EMS component of the emergency services delivery system is more heavily regulated than the firefighting operations. The Connecticut Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS) regulates all EMS services and providers. Ambulances must be licensed and inspected by OEMS. EMTs hold state certifications, and paramedics hold state licenses. Providers must deliver patient care in accordance with statewide EMS medical protocols as well as any protocols that have been developed by their medical resource hospital. Services that bill Medicare and Medicaid for patient care and transport must comply with regulations promulgated by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid. NFPA 455, *Standard for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Systems* (2026 edition), provides a template for local stakeholders to evaluate an EMS system and to make

[22] NFPA 1750, 2026 edition, section 3.3.81.6.

improvements based on that evaluation. The Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS)[23] also establishes voluntary benchmarks for EMS operations.

Response Metrics

This section of the MRI report provides a framework for evaluating fire and EMS staffing and response needs. There are two primary questions that communities should address:

- Can fire and EMS units arrive at an incident within a time frame that is acceptable to the community?
- Are fire and EMS units staffed with enough personnel to safely carry out critical tasks?

The following resources can guide the town council, fire department, and the community as they strive to answer these questions. In essence, the answers to these questions determine the level of risk that the community is willing to accept.

The following graphic, **Figure V-6**, demonstrates fire growth in a single-family residence house fire with a typical suburban fire department response timeline. "Flashover" is the moment when a fire stops burning just one object (like a sofa) and instantly becomes a fire burning the entire room. This usually occurs when the upper layer of the room reaches approximately 1,100°F.

[23] The Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS) is an independent commission that established a comprehensive series of standards for the ambulance service industry.

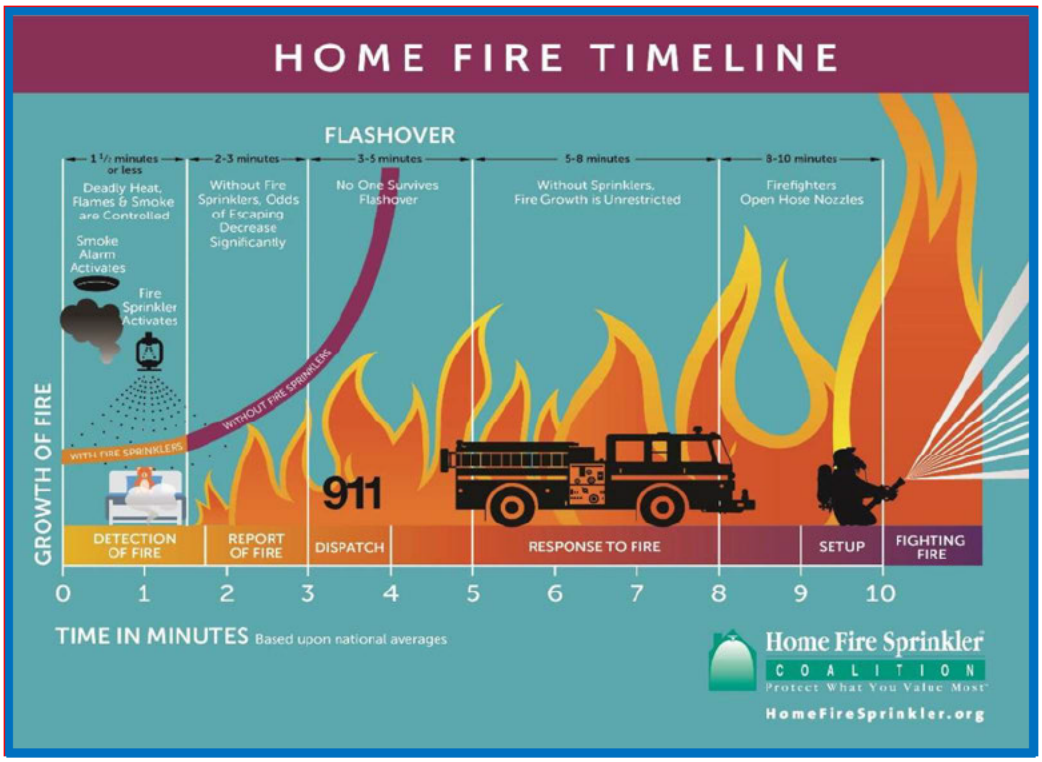


FIGURE V-6: HOME FIRE TIMELINE CURVE SHOWING ACTIVATION TIMES AND EFFECTIVENESS OF RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLERS (APPROXIMATELY 1 MINUTE), FLASHOVER (3 TO 5 MINUTES) AND FIREFIGHTERS APPLYING FIRST WATER TO THE FIRE AFTER NOTIFICATION, DISPATCH, RESPONSE, AND SET UP (10 MINUTES).
Image credit: Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition

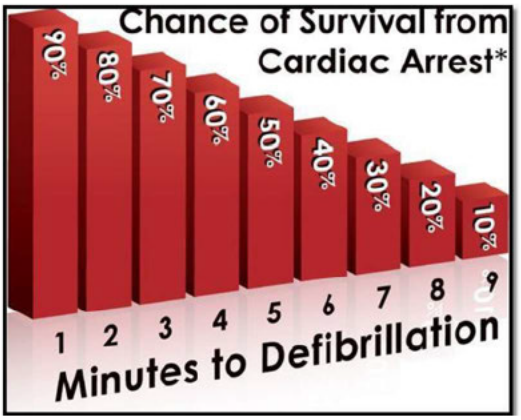


FIGURE V-7
CARDIAC SURVIVAL MATRIX

Heart attack and stroke victims require rapid intervention, care, and transport to a medical facility. The longer the time duration without care, the less likely the patient is to fully recover. Numerous studies have shown that irreversible brain damage can occur if the brain is deprived of oxygen for more than four minutes. In addition, the potential for successful resuscitation during cardiac arrest decreases exponentially with each passing minute that cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or cardiac defibrillation is delayed (**Figure V-7**).

Since the 1970s, arriving within eight minutes of receipt of an emergency call, 90% of the time, has been the recognized benchmark for determining the quality of an EMS system. Today, the

national standard of care benchmark based on stroke and cardiac arrest protocols has evolved to have an emergency response unit on scene at a medical emergency within six minutes of receipt of the call.

NFPA 1750*, Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Services, Special Operations, and Fire Prevention Activities* (2026 Edition) is the nationally recognized consensus standard on fire service staffing and deployment. **It is a voluntary standard that should be utilized as a comprehensive strategic document and not cherry-picked to satisfy only one particular aspect of fire and EMS operations (such as staffing).** NFPA 1750 should be coordinated with other NFPA standards such as NFPA 1550, *Standard for Emergency Responder Health and Safety* (2024 edition), and NFPA 1700, *Guide for Structural Firefighting* (2026 edition).

Staffing and Critical Tasking

The operations necessary to successfully extinguish a structure fire and do so effectively, efficiently, and safely require a carefully coordinated and controlled plan of action, where certain operations, such as venting ahead of the advancing interior hose line(s), must be carried out with a high degree of precision and timing. Multiple operations, frequently where seconds count, such as search and rescue operations and trying to cut off a rapidly advancing fire, must also be conducted simultaneously. If there are not enough personnel on the incident initially to perform all the critical tasks, some will, out of necessity, be delayed. This can result in an increased risk of serious injury or death to building occupants and firefighters, and increased property damage.

There has been much research done by a number of fire departments on the effects of various staffing levels. One constant that has emerged is that company efficiency and effectiveness decrease substantially, while injuries increase, when company/unit staffing falls below four personnel. A 2010 comprehensive yet scientifically conducted, verified, and validated study titled *Multi-Phase Study on Firefighter Safety and the Deployment of Resources,* was performed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), in conjunction with the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the International Association of Fire Fighters, and the Center for Public Safety Excellence. This landmark study researched residential fires, where the majority of fire injuries and fatalities occur.

The study concluded that the size of firefighter crews has a substantial effect on the fire department's ability to protect lives and property in residential fires and occupancies[24].

Several key findings of the study include:

- Four-person firefighting crews were able to complete 22 essential firefighting and rescue tasks in a typical residential structure 30% faster than two-person crews, and 25% faster than three-person crews.
- The four-person crews were able to deliver water to a similar sized fire 15% faster than the two-person crews, and 6% faster than three-person crews, steps that help to reduce property damage and reduce danger/risks to firefighters.
- Four-person crews were able to complete critical search and rescue operations 30% faster than two-person crews, and 5% faster than three-person crews.

NFPA 1750 establishes the following benchmarks for personnel that are needed to safely mitigate a structure fire involving several rooms in a 2,000-square-foot dwelling (**Figure V-8**). Obviously, this number dramatically increases based on the extent of involvement, size of the structure, presence of hazardous materials, and use of the occupancy. As an example, a significant fire within a garden-style apartment complex or an open-air strip mall commercial requires a minimum of 27/28 personnel based on the potential hazards that could be encountered.

CRITICAL TASK	NEEDED PERSONNEL
Incident Command	1
Continuous Water Supply	1
Fire Attack via Two Handlines	4
Hydrant Hook Up - Forcible Entry - Utilities	2
Primary Search and Rescue	2
Ground Ladders and Ventilation	2
Aerial Operator if Aerial is Used	1
Establishment of IRIC (Initial Rapid Intervention Crew)	4
TOTAL EFFECTIVE RESPONSE FORCE	16 (17 if aerial is used)

FIGURE V-8: NFPA 1750 MINIMUM LOW TO MODERATE RISK STRUCTURE FIRE STAFFING NEEDS

[24] This study looked at staffing only and its implications on fire ground operations. It did not consider other factors such as cost.

Figure V-9 illustrates in a different way the critical tasks and resource deployment required on low and moderate hazard incidents such as residential and small commercial structure fires. Although some people advocate that these types of incidents can be handled with fewer personnel, unless it is a small fire, there is the possibility that there will not be sufficient personnel available to perform all the critical tasks, necessitating some tasks to be delayed. Ultimately, determining the acceptable level of risk they are willing to assume for the citizens they represent will be a key decision that the mayor and the Wallingford Town Council will need to make.

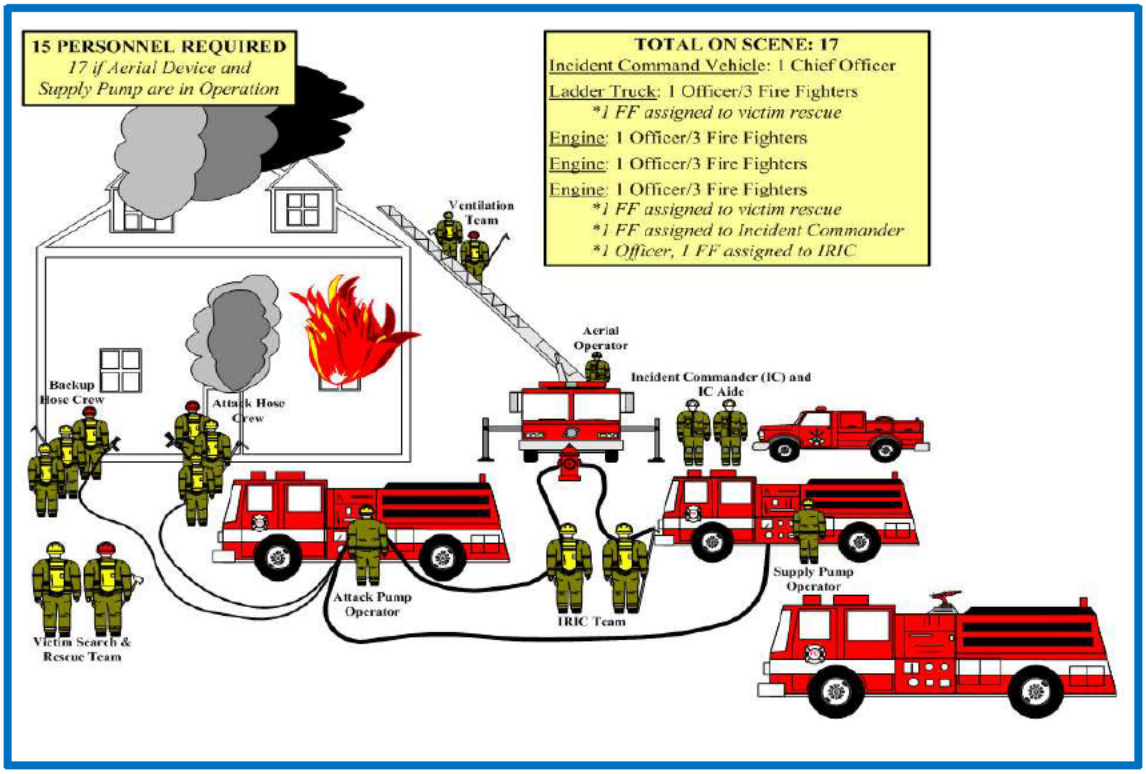


FIGURE V-9: LOW TO MODERATE RISK RESPONSE-INTERIOR FIRE ATTACK

Typical minimum staffing needs for career or primarily career fire departments for a fire involving several rooms in a 2,000-square-foot, one-family residential occupancy. These are the proverbial "bread and butter" structural fire incidents that fire departments respond to and are by far the most common type of structure fire, accounting for around 70% of those types of incidents. The full first alarm assignment should arrive on scene within eight minutes of dispatch.

Image credit: IAFF 266

The ability to get enough personnel, along with appropriate apparatus, to the scene of a typical residential structure fire is critical to operational success and firefighter safety. ***Accomplishing this within the eight-minute time frame (to have 16 – 17 personnel on scene) as specified in NFPA 1750 is an important operational benchmark.*** The WFD should make achieving this goal

its highest priority. This goal can potentially be achieved by establishing automatic aid agreements with area fire departments. "Automatic aid" is the dispatching of a mutual aid fire department upon receipt of the report of a fire, rather than waiting until the first unit arrives at the scene and calls for assistance after making an assessment.

NFPA 1750 recommends a minimum of 27/28 personnel on the initial response for fires involving moderate hazard garden-style apartments and strip shopping centers. Automatic aid can also be considered for these types of occupancies.

Current Staffing Concern

In Wallingford, the daily staffing for engine and ladder companies is a 3-person crew comprised of a lieutenant and two firefighters. When a firefighter-paramedic accompanies a patient to the hospital, the engine company crew is reduced to two personnel. This significantly lowers the effective operating capabilities of that engine company.

Beyond the NFPA standard(s), which do not carry the weight of regulation or law, is the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Respiratory Protection Standard, CFR 1910.134, which is mandatory for municipal fire departments in Connecticut. One key provision of the Respiratory Protection Standard that is directly applicable to fire department staffing is known as the ***"Two-In/Two-Out"*** rule. In brief, this regulation specifies that anytime firefighters operate in an environment or atmosphere that is "immediately dangerous to life and health" (IDLH), whenever two members enter the IDLH area together/as a team, they must maintain visual or voice communication with two additional firefighters who must remain outside of the IDLH atmosphere, prepared to render immediate emergency assistance to those inside (**Figure V-10**).

The OSHA rule provides an exception that states that the rule does not apply in emergency rescue situations where a person is visible and in need of immediate rescue, or there is credible and reasonable information that potentially viable victims are still in need of rescue. It is important to note that the potential for an IDLH atmosphere to exist is not just limited to structure fires. They can result from natural or propane gas leaks, carbon monoxide incidents, confined space emergencies, or chemical spills.

To comply with the "Two-In/Two-Out" rule, a team of four firefighters must be assembled before an interior fire attack can be made when the fire has progressed beyond the incipient stage, except in an imminent life-threatening situation when immediate action could prevent the loss of life or serious injury before the team of four firefighters is assembled. It is essential that the

department's standard operating guidelines (SOGs) and standard operating procedures (SOPs) address compliance with the Two-In/Two-Out rule. Documented training, on-scene command oversight, and post-incident evaluations will ensure that firefighters are safe and in compliance with this rule.

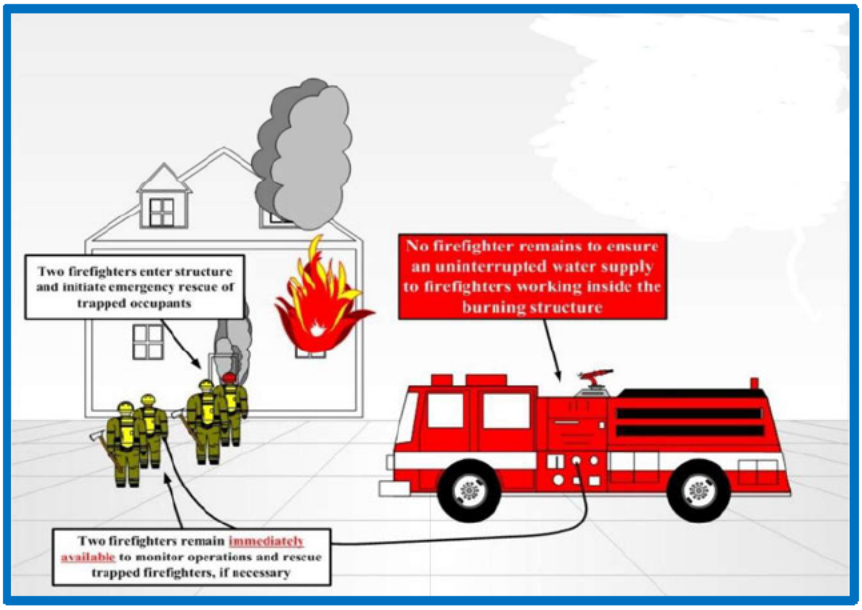


FIGURE V-10: OSHA TWO-IN/TWO-OUT
Image Credit: IAFF Local 266

Occupational Safety and Health

Firefighting is an inherently dangerous occupation, marked by high risks of acute injury (burns, trauma, falls) and severe long-term illnesses, primarily cancers and heart disease, from exposure to carcinogens, heat stress, smoke inhalation, and physical/emotional strain, which leads to higher mortality rates than many other jobs. EMS personnel have significantly higher injury and fatality rates than the national average due to risks like motor vehicle crashes, high rates of assaults from patients, exposure to infectious diseases, and severe musculoskeletal injuries from lifting and physically demanding work.

A robust occupational safety and health program reduces injuries, manages risks, improves equipment reliability, reduces liability, reduces costs for workers' compensation claims and overtime required to fill vacant positions, and strengthens the organizational culture and morale by demonstrating that employee health and well-being are valued.

Guidance on the development and implementation of a fire and EMS department occupational safety and health program is found in NFPA 1550, *Standard for Emergency Responder Health and Safety*, 2024 edition.[25]

The department recently reclassified the position of EMS lieutenant to become "medical and safety officer". Two positions have been created and will be assigned to two of the four shifts. These individuals will be responsible for EMS quality assurance, training, and are paramedics who can respond to ALS calls when needed. In addition, they serve as incident safety officers, which is an essential function in the incident command system. It is the department's goal to create an additional two (2) medical and safety officer positions so that all shifts are covered.

The department has representation on the town's safety committee but does not have its own safety committee.

Fire Insurance Rating System

The Verisk/ISO Public Protection Classification (PPC)[26] program, evaluates a community's fire suppression capabilities on a scale of 1 to 10 using the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS), which weighs the fire department (50%), water supply (40%), and emergency communications (10%), with additional credit available for community risk reduction efforts. While primarily utilized by insurance carriers to determine property insurance premiums—where a lower rating generally yields lower costs—the PPC also serves as a national benchmark that has recently been updated to better reflect modern technologies, training, and safety standards. The Town of Wallingford currently holds a Class 3/3Y rating, placing it in the top 10% of communities nationwide, though the report suggests that addressing specific deficiencies could help the town achieve a Class 2 rating in the future. It is important to note that this grading system applies strictly to fire suppression capabilities and does not evaluate emergency medical services.

[25] www.nfpa.org/1550
[26] https://www.isomitigation.com/ppc/



FIGURE V-11: FOUR KEY PARTS OF ISO PPC EVALUATION PROCESS

Source: Verisk/ISO

It may be possible for the town to move to a higher rating during the next rating cycle. The factors in the 2017 evaluation report should be taken into consideration during fire department strategic planning. However, an upgrade to the town's ISO rating will have the most beneficial impact on commercial insurance policyholders, not the owners of single-family homes. A goal of improving insurance ratings should not be the primary factor in decisions concerning improvements to the fire and emergency services department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation V-1: ***WFD should institute a formal pre-incident planning program that is aligned with NFPA 1660, Standard for Emergency, Continuity, and Crisis Management: Preparedness, Response, and Recovery (2024 edition). The program should result in an up-to-date pre-incident plan for every commercial property, target hazard, educational occupancy, multi-family residential occupancy, and place of assembly. A pre-incident plan includes data such as the occupancy type, floor plans, construction type, hazards to firefighting, special conditions in the building, apparatus placement plan, water supply plan, and forcible entry and ventilation plan. Pre-planning will improve firefighters' knowledge of the specific tactics needed to handle a fire or other emergency at a facility and will alert them to on-site hazards and risks. Pre-incident plans should***

be reviewed regularly and tested by periodic table-top exercises and on-site drills. Pre-incident plans should be made available on the iPads in responding units via a cloud-based software platform.

Recommendation V-2: ***The WFD should establish a formal "performance improvement" process for fire suppression operations. The creation of a formal review and critique process for all incidents, and a process for modifying SOGs, SOPs, training priorities, and equipment as determined by the performance improvement program.***

Recommendation V-4: ***The WFD should ensure that all EMS incidents are properly classified as either advanced life support (ALS) or basic life support (BLS) care, based upon the actual situation found on scene, not what the incident was dispatched as.***

Recommendation V-5: ***The WFD should further analyze its response time data, and if necessary, identify ways to reduce incident turnout time with the goal of achieving a 90th percentile time of not more than 60 seconds for EMS incidents and 80 seconds for fire incidents as recommended in NFPA 1750. Turnout time is the response time component that the agencies have the most direct control over, which can lead to reduced overall response times.***

Recommendation V-6: ***The WFD should significantly enhance its data collection and analysis procedures and its ability to generate statistics regarding a wide range of its operations. This should include 80th and 90th percentile turnout and travel times as recommended in NFPA 1750. Having these more conservative times available will provide a more accurate response assessment and allow for better long-range master planning.***

Recommendation V-7: ***The WFD should develop an SOP, specifying what information and times are necessary for the dispatcher to enter into a fire incident report prior to the report being passed to the fire department. In order to develop the most accurate statistical database, all response time data should be entered into the appropriate National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) incident reporting database in a precise manner (hours/minutes/seconds). In order to accurately assess each component of overall response time, call processing time, turnout time – response time, these times should each be entered separately, and into the appropriate category in the NERIS database. The WPD public safety communications center's computer assisted dispatch (CAD) system should be able to automatically generate this data and begin the NERIS report.***

Recommendation V-8: ***In consultation and cooperation with its neighboring departments, the WFD should enter into automatic aid agreements that specify (and increase as appropriate) the number and types of resources that should be dispatched to various types of reported emergencies. For structure fire incidents, the department should strive to have a minimum of 14/15 firefighting personnel on the scene of every single-family residential structure fire within eight minutes of the time that units are responding. For fires in multi-family residential buildings and commercial occupancies, a minimum of 27/28 personnel should be on scene within eight minutes of the time that units are responding in order to be able to establish a fully effective response force. Even if additional permanent staffing was added, the use of automatic aid and mutual aid will need to continue and should be enhanced, based upon the type of occupancy that was reported that the fire is in.***

Recommendation V-9: ***The WFD should conduct a separate analysis of its EMS response and transport capability to determine where it can improve in terms of response times and patient outcomes and possibly adjust its structure or response mode.***

Recommendation V-10: ***The WFD should track data on incidents such as elderly falls, drownings, and head injuries as an example to see if there are any public education and mitigation measures that can be included in a community risk reduction program.***

Recommendation V-11: ***The WFD should establish a health and safety committee that is responsible for:***

- ***Making recommendations for compliance with NFPA 1550, Standard for Emergency Responder Health and Safety (2024 edition)***
- ***Reviewing injury reports and making recommendations for corrective action (e.g., training, equipment, policies, SOPs, SOGs, etc.)***
- ***Reviewing emergency incident after-action reports and making recommendations for health and safety improvements (e.g., training, equipment, policies, SOPs, SOGs, etc.)***

The committee should include representation from all ranks, the medical and safety officer(s), and a representative of the collective bargaining unit. The committee should meet monthly and have a formal agenda and meeting minutes. The meeting minutes should be distributed to the entire department and shared with the town safety committee.

<u>Recommendation V-12</u>: The WFD should staff all shifts with a medical and safety officer. This will require adding two (2) new positions in the future.

CHAPTER VI - SUPPORT FUNCTIONS



Fire Prevention

A critical task of any fire department is that of protecting the built environment and ensuring compliance with various statutes, codes, and regulations. In Wallingford, this effort is spearheaded by the Office of the Fire Marshal/Fire Prevention Division. The office is responsible for inspections, plan review, code enforcement, fire investigations, public education, and community risk reduction programs. These distinct areas provide the entire department with the ability to prevent fires and risks to the community or reduce the overall impact of these occurrences. No one component is more important than another; however, some are more stringently required by code, statute, or regulation.

The fire marshal's office is staffed by the fire marshal, two (2) deputy fire marshals, and an administrative clerk. The office is located on the first floor of fire headquarters. The administrative clerk and deputy fire marshal share the same workspace, with the fire marshal having a dedicated office. This does allow for collaboration and coordination between the staff.

It is imperative that the town and department recognize that in order for their work to be performed effectively and efficiently, the fire marshal's office is supported with proper personnel, equipment, and training. The importance of incorporating technology into daily work will streamline operations. This includes but is not limited to the areas of communication, plan review and permitting applications, and utilization of the records management system to complete inspections in the field using a tablet or similar device. The office environment should

be equipped with the necessary code books and electronics to support the office. Several online platforms, such as NFPA Link®[27] and UpCodes[28], are available to assist in both plan review and code enforcement. Additionally, there should be a needs assessment conducted on the proper personal protective equipment (PPE), gas detection equipment, and support equipment necessary to support investigations and inspections. Continuing education training is vital and mandated by the State of Connecticut. The certified fire marshal staff must complete 90 hours of credit hours in a three-year period. Those classes are offered as a blend of both online programming and in-person classes. The department should ensure that members are offered the necessary time and opportunity to participate in this training, even off-duty if necessary.

Code enforcement, via the inspection process, is a time-consuming endeavor. Without proper staffing and organization, no fire marshal's office can be assured of meeting the statutory requirements outlined by the state of Connecticut. The Town of Wallingford has a significant number of multi-family/high occupancy residential structures, commercial and industrial occupancies, and high-hazard occupancies. While prioritization seems to fall on high life hazard occupancies (residential), an effort must be made to come to reasonable compliance in meeting the inspection frequency requirements for remaining occupancy classes. Fire inspections are documented on the department's ESO data management system.

Plan review is a vital component of the prevention efforts of the department. This process ensures compliance with both building and fire codes for new construction and renovations of buildings. By code, submitted plans must be reviewed within 30 days of receipt. Coordination between the building department and the fire marshal's office is vital to ensure compliance as well as to make the overall process smoother for the building owner or applicant. Plan review processes are also a potential avenue for the department to generate revenue. The town has established a fee schedule for reviews of building plans, fire alarm system plans, fire sprinkler plans and commercial kitchen hood suppression system. Licenses are issued for the following occupancy types: liquor sales, assembly, educational, nursing and convalescent homes, residential board and care, group day care home, hotel and dormitory, and temporary tents for the sale of pyrotechnics. The fee schedule was last updated on September 5, 2023. The fire marshal indicated that a comprehensive review of fees is underway.

The fire marshal's office participates in major project reviews in collaboration with the planning department and building department. Projects over 20,000 sq. ft. in size may require an

[27] www.link.nfpa.org
[28] www.up.codes

independent, third-party plans review. The town is in the process of implementing a platform for the electronic submittal, review, and approval of plans and permits. The fire marshal's office will be included in this system.

The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department, through the efforts of both its fire prevention personnel and fire suppression/EMS personnel, has implemented a public education campaign. The initiative includes participation in community events, establishment of youth fire prevention and intervention programs, providing youth fire prevention education talks, participation in the statewide fire prevention poster contest, offering community risk reduction efforts for the senior community, and installing free home smoke alarms. In addition, prevention staff are involved in statewide committees and programs that focus on fire prevention programs and code development.

The fire marshal's office is responsible for investigating the origin and cause of fires. In 2025, approximately 50 fire investigations were conducted. The CT State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit is notified of all fire fatalities and large loss fires. On average, the CSP Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit responds to incidents in Wallingford approximately five (5) times per year.

Dispatch/Emergency Telecommunications

The Wallingford Police Department operates the town's public safety emergency communications center, which provides dispatching and operational communications support to the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department. The communications center is a Connecticut 911 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) and receives 911 requests for police, fire, and EMS from callers in Wallingford. 911 calls from limited access highways are received by the Connecticut State Police, who transfer fire and EMS requests to the Wallingford PSAP. WPD public safety dispatchers are civilian employees.

The scope of the MRI study did not include a detailed assessment of the communications center. However, we do address communications needs and capabilities from the perspective of a fire and EMS agency.

A public safety emergency communications center that serves all public safety agencies is an effective and efficient means of coordinating prompt responses to emergencies. The dispatching and communications procedures of fire, EMS, and police agencies do vary considerably. The

center's policies, procedures, and training must take into consideration the needs of all the agencies that it serves.

Examples of fire and EMS dispatching best practices include:

- Fire and EMS agencies typically use plain language for two-way radio communications, while police departments prefer "10-codes."
- Critical transmissions from fire apparatus, firefighters, and incident commanders are repeated by dispatchers to ensure that all units understand conditions at an incident that impact operations and safety.
- Dispatchers provide time checks to the incident commander, which provides guidance on when to evacuate a building due to the duration of the fire (potential collapse) and regular personnel accountability checks.
- Dispatchers make decisions (pursuant to running cards[29] and protocols) to ensure that mutual aid response and station coverage are fulfilled.
- EMS patient information must be kept confidential in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).
- Dispatchers must closely monitor the incident command operational radio channel and be prepared to institute alerting procedures if a "Mayday" is called.
- Dispatchers must be trained and competent in incident command system (ICS) procedures.
- Many communications centers provide "pre-alerts" to fire personnel so that firefighters and/or EMTs can put on their PPE, mount apparatus, etc., while the dispatcher is receiving more details about the incident. Pre-alerts reduce total response times. Pre-alerts can be a tone with a brief voice message, a monitor that mirrors what the dispatcher is typing into the computer-assisted dispatch (CAD) system, or can broadcast the phone conversation over the in-station public address system.
- Volunteer fire departments use alerting systems like "I Am Responding."[30]. Connected to their smartphones via an app, these systems enable volunteers to acknowledge that they are responding to the station or directly to a scene. They also receive updates on the incident via an interface with the CAD.
- CAD systems require constant updating with fire pre-planning information, changes in building use or ownership, street names, mutual aid response availability, running cards,

[29] A **run card** (often called a "response plan" or "assignment card") is a pre-determined set of instructions that dictates exactly which fire and EMS units should respond to a specific location for a specific type of emergency.
[30] https://iamresponding.com/

etc. A manual, paper-based backup capability must be readily available in the event of a CAD failure (cyber-attack, loss of internet, etc.)

- NFPA 1225, *Standard for Emergency Services Communications*[31] (2022 edition), identifies the minimum job performance requirements (JPRs) for public safety telecommunications personnel, and provides minimum requirements for the installation, maintenance, and use of emergency services communications systems.
- Public safety emergency communications center standards, training, and performance criteria are offered by APCO International.[32]
- Fire apparatus and ambulances should be equipped with mobile data terminals (MDTs), often in the form of a tablet or iPad (note: WFD is in the process of replacing existing apparatus iPads). MDTs receive dispatch information and enable incident commanders and fire officers to retrieve fire pre-plan data (building plans, water supply, utility information, special hazards, pre-determined tactical procedures, etc.). Incident commanders use an MDT to coordinate incident logistics and personnel accountability. EMTs and paramedics use MDTs or other handheld devices to complete patient care reports (PCRs) and can be a resource for pharmacological data.
- Dispatchers should be included in post-incident reviews or "hot-washes" so that communications procedures and practices can be analyzed and updated.
- Following a serious incident, dispatchers should be offered the opportunity to participate in critical incident stress debriefing (CISD) sessions and/or follow up with the town's employee assistance program (EAP).

Wallingford public safety dispatchers are trained and certified public safety telecommunicators pursuant to RCSA§28-30. This training includes certification as emergency medical dispatchers (EMD), which enables them to provide life-saving information over the phone to 911 callers while EMS is enroute. Dispatchers can instruct callers on how to stop bleeding, administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), assist a choking victim, use an automatic external defibrillator (AED), or even deliver a baby. WFD provides "ride-alongs" for new dispatchers so that they have a basic understanding of fire and EMS operations and have to the opportunity to work face-to-face with fire department personnel.

[31] www.nfpa.org/1225
[32] https://www.apcointl.org/

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation VI-1: ***The fire marshal should review current office workflow processes to ensure efficiency in scheduling and time management. The administrative clerk, as well as all staff in the office, should have access to calendars for appointments and scheduled plans review.***

Recommendation VI-2: ***The fire marshal should ensure that inspection, code enforcement, and plan review workloads are delegated to deputy fire marshals to increase service deliverables to the community.***

Recommendation VI-3: ***The fire marshal should develop a master schedule and database of inspections required under Connecticut General Statutes and verify that required inspections and inspection reports are completed in compliance with statutory time frames. Consideration should be given to utilizing a team approach to the inspection of larger facilities.***

Recommendation VI-4: ***The fire marshal's office should conduct training for on-duty shift personnel on topics such as:***

- ***the identification of hazards and risks in occupancies, including on-site tours of buildings under construction and target hazards.***
- ***fire scene preservation***
- ***basic fire origin and cause investigation procedures***
- ***New and emerging technologies that present challenges and risks to firefighters and EMS personnel***

Recommendation VI-5: ***The fire marshal's office should participate in the department's pre-incident planning process by providing updates on new construction, renovations (including changes to fire protection features and systems), changes of occupancy, and new processes.***

Recommendation VI-6: ***The fire marshal should conduct a staffing analysis to determine the need for additional inspection, code enforcement, and public education personnel based on the following metrics:***

- ***Number of mandatory inspections not being completed per year***
- ***Backlog and documented delays in plans, reviews, and permit approvals***

- ***Demonstrated need for in-house fire protection engineering resources***
- ***Backlog and documented delays in completing fire investigations***
- ***Staffing requirements for participation in the community risk reduction (CRR) program, e.g., public education specialists, etc.***

<u>Recommendation VI-7:</u> The Town of Wallingford and WFD should review all fees for possible increases in accordance with state law. This review should be conducted annually.

<u>Recommendation VI-8:</u> The WFD should establish a mentoring program to guide and encourage new fire department members as they progress through the initial training process.

<u>Recommendation VI-9:</u> The WFD should require that all career firefighting personnel receive at least 24 hours of structural firefighting training per year.

<u>Recommendation VI-10:</u> All WFD career firefighting personnel should be required to complete a minimum of 96 hours of documented training per year (an average of 8 hours per month), including all mandatory training.

<u>Recommendation VI-11:</u> All training that is conducted, no matter how brief or inconsequential it may seem, <u>MUST</u> result in the completion of a formal training report. Training reports should include the date, time training commenced, time duration of the training, the instructor, the officer in charge, names of all personnel trained, and include a detailed description of the training or reference the formal lesson plan utilized. Documentation of training activities should continue to be recorded in the department's ESO fire management system.

<u>Recommendation VI-12:</u> The WFD should strongly encourage its career officers to obtain a certain level of fire officer certification as a job requirement, such as Fire Officer I for lieutenant, Fire Officer II for captain, Fire Officer III for deputy fire chief, and Fire Officer Level IV for fire chief, with the future goal of establishing these as required certifications.

<u>Recommendation VI-13:</u> The WFD should require that all medical and safety officers be certified as Incident Safety Officers (ISOs) through the Connecticut Fire Academy. Additional department officers should be certified to ensure that a certified safety officer is operating at the scene of every major incident.

Recommendation VI-14: ***The WFD should develop a professional development program to move the Department from a "training for today" mindset to a "preparing for tomorrow" strategy. A professional development program supports advancement, enhances succession planning, provides individuals with the skills and experience needed to excel when promoted, and ultimately strengthens the overall performance of the Department.***

Recommendation VI-15: ***The Wallingford Police Department and Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department should jointly develop policies, procedures, and performance criteria in accordance with the recommendations of NFPA 1225 and APCO International.***

Recommendation VI-16: ***While recognizing that the police department is responsible for the operation of the communications center, WPD and WFD should establish a formal joint working group that meets at least monthly to:***

- ***Develop and recommend policies and procedures for fire and EMS dispatching and communications.***
- ***Recommend training for dispatchers, police, and fire/EMS personnel related to communications and ICS.***
- ***Review and critique incidents with the goal of improving future performance and operational capabilities.***
- ***Identify and recommend benchmarks for compliance with NFPA 1225 and APCO International standards.***

Recommendation VI-17: ***The town should consider establishing a fire and EMS pre-alert system in all fire stations, including a smartphone capability for the volunteer fire companies.***

Recommendation VI-18: ***WFD should establish a formal process for the regular review and updating of incident response assignments in the CAD, including automatic aid and mutual aid. This should include up-to-date paper back-ups of all procedures and run cards.***

Recommendation VI-19: ***Once a formal pre-incident planning program is established, WFD should establish a formal process for reviewing and updating pre-plan information in the CAD.***

CHAPTER VII - FIRE DEPARTMENT FACILITIES AND APPARATUS

Fire Department Facilities

Fire and EMS stations are a critical community asset. The station facilities of a modern fire and EMS department are designed to do much more than simply provide a garage for apparatus and a place for firefighters and EMS personnel to wait for a call. Well-designed fire and EMS facilities enable staff to perform their duties effectively, efficiently, and safely.

Another critical aspect of operational readiness of a fire department is proper station location and deployment strategies employed using the apparatus and personnel assigned to those stations. The MRI study team observed the challenges associated with the grade level train crossing that bisects the town. Two of the three staffed stations located on the east side of town are primarily affected by the crossing. However, all responding units can be delayed when trying to traverse town. This impacts apparatus response times and delays service. Additionally, two of the three staffed ambulances are located on one side of the tracks, often requiring apparatus relocation to cover additional calls for service. Lastly, both of the department's tankers are located on the same side of town, even though the west side of town also has areas lacking proper hydrant coverage. An analysis of actual response delays could warrant the additional use of mutual aid or automatic aid to cover areas of the town when WFD responses are delayed by trains.

The project team from MRI visited all four fire stations during multiple visits, as well as a former fire station that is still owned by the town and utilized by the public works department. The former fire station, Cook Hill, is listed last.

FIRE STATION	PICTURE	LOCATION	DATE	CONDITION
Fire Headquarters Co. 2		75 Masonic Ave.	1974	*Good*

Company 1		95 North Main St.	1941	Poor
Company 7		846 North Farms Rd.	2017	Excellent
East Wallingford Company 8		2 Kondracki Lane	1980	Good
Cook Hill		37 Hall Rd	1989	Poor

FIGURE VII-1: WALLINGFORD FIRE SERVICE FACILITY INVENTORY

Fire Headquarters

Fire headquarters is located at 75 Masonic Avenue, adjacent to Route US Route 15 and CT Route 5. It serves as the primary administration building, housing the offices of the chief, deputy chiefs (2), and the fire marshal's office. Fire and EMS operations at headquarters include the shift commander (battalion chief), one 4-person engine company (drops to 3-persons when the assigned FF/Paramedic is providing patient care and transport to the hospital), one 3-person ladder company, and an EMS lieutenant. Also housed in this station is one of three BLS ambulances that serve the town. The site includes the training building and an additional outbuilding/garage used to store spare apparatus.

The first floor houses the main reception area and the fire marshal's office, with the chief's offices, and additional operational/support offices are located on the second floor. There is a training room located on the third floor and a conference room in the basement. All administrative areas are accessible via interior stairs or elevator. On one side of the apparatus bays are the kitchen, gear storage, firefighters' bunk room and bathroom, a converted bay that now serves as a gym, and some storage rooms. On the opposite side of the bays are the officers' bunk rooms and bathroom, and the EMS supply room.

Two issues were apparent on the tour. First, there are no separate facilities for male and female personnel. Second, all usable space is occupied with little to no room for growth or expansion. Another concern is the location of the gear storage area, which does not provide adequate ventilation; however, it is situated so that the turnout gear is not exposed to ultraviolet light.

Company 1

Company 1 is located at 95 North Main Street. This is the oldest station in Wallingford and needs replacement or a full renovation to meet modern operational, structural, code compliance, and occupational health and safety needs. The building is in an optimal location for responses and is located next to the old police station. The apparatus area is very small for today's equipment, and there is no room for expansion. There is no "dirty area" for disrobing, storing, and decontaminating PPE after an incident. There is a potential to combine the station (at least the office and living areas) within the old police station, which must be maintained due to the infrastructure located inside.

The peak demand ambulance (Medic 3) and its crew are assigned to the Company 1 station. Because of the lack of space, the ambulance must be parked outside. CT OEMS regulations require that the temperature of the patient compartment be maintained at 65°-75°F. at all times.

To meet this requirement, the ambulance is equipped with a separate HVAC system that is connected to building power via a flexible cable ("shoreline"). During off-peak hours, Medic 3 is garaged at the North Farms station. During extreme weather (very low or very high temperatures, snow, etc.), Medic 3 remains at North Farms, and the crew responds to calls from there.

North Farms--Company 7

The North Farms station combines the career and volunteer operations of WFD. The career staff operates the 3-person quint and one BLS ambulance. The Company 7 volunteers, when called or in station, staff an additional engine a tanker and a rescue. The building has separate living quarters for the career and volunteers, which are accessible via separate exterior doors or from the apparatus bay. The floor plans on both sides mirror each other in design.

East Wallingford-Company 8

The volunteer members of Company 8 operate an engine, a tanker and a squad from this station. In the early 2000's, the station underwent a partial renovation and an addition, making space for a larger kitchen, sleeping quarters, and training/community room. Of note is the limited space on the apparatus floor, requiring personnel to navigate around the apparatus to access areas of the building. Additionally, PPE is stored on the apparatus floor. This exposes the gear to ultraviolet light, which deteriorates the protective capability of this equipment. The apparatus floor has significant cracking and spalling of the concrete, especially around the floor drains. An engineering assessment of the apparatus floor could determine what remedial steps should be taken.

Cook Hill Station

This station was previously occupied by the Cook Hill Volunteer Fire Company. That company and the station have been inactive for an extended period of time. The town still owns the building and the land, which is currently under the control of public works, and serves as the site for one of the main communication towers utilized by Wallingford's emergency services.

A quick inspection showed that structurally, the building could be a viable consideration to reoccupy it as either a staffed fire house or to relocate the peak demand staffed ambulance. That ambulance is currently responding out of the Company 1 location but is parked outside of the building due to space constraints. A needs assessment and improvement plan, including potential costs, should be conducted to determine the viability of this idea. Interior renovations, while feasible, could be considerable to get the building into service as a fire station again. This

includes, but is not limited to, vehicle exhaust capture system, bathrooms, creating a bunk room, and an office for an assigned officer. Due to the layout of the parking lot and communications tower, there is little room to expand horizontally, so consideration should be given to going vertically if possible.

Building Security

Fire stations are critical infrastructure that are essential to the safety and health of citizens and the economic well-being of the community. In years past, fire stations were relatively wide open for the convenience of firefighters and the public. Unfortunately, today's world demands a higher level of security to prevent vandalism, theft (including theft of vehicles), attacks on personnel, and disruptions to the delivery of emergency services.

Building security technologies and protocols should be implemented in all fire and emergency services facilities based on a security assessment, as discussed in the recommendation below.



Fire Department Apparatus and Equipment

The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department is equipped with a wide range of apparatus and equipment. The technology and standards for fire and EMS apparatus and equipment are constantly evolving to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and safety of

firefighters and EMTs with an overarching goal of ensuring the safety of the public and positive patient outcomes.

During the visit, the MRI team noted that several individuals of varying ranks have ancillary responsibilities with regard to apparatus and equipment. This includes maintenance, such as SCBA technicians, and purchasing and procurement.

NFPA 1900, *Standard for Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Vehicles, Automotive Fire Apparatus, Wildland Fire Apparatus, and Automotive Ambulances* (2024 edition)[33] provides guidance on the evaluation, upgrading, refurbishing, and replacement of fire apparatus. The standard recommends that apparatus 15 years old or older, if properly maintained, be removed from front-line service and placed in reserve. Apparatus that is 25 years old should be replaced.



These factors, as well as projected future needs, must be taken into consideration when specifying and purchasing apparatus and equipment. Every effort should be made to make new apparatus as versatile and multi-functional capable as is possible and practical.

The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department recently received a new fire pumper (engine), two (2) new ambulances, and a new shift commander (battalion chief) command car. The town has ordered an additional fire pumper and a 105-foot aerial ladder that are expected to be delivered in 2027. A new quint is on order and is scheduled for delivery in 2028.

Vehicle maintenance and apparatus repairs are performed by the Wallingford Public Works Department, although they do not currently have any personnel who are certified as emergency vehicle technicians (EVTs). The department has a basic system for tracking maintenance.

[33] www.nfpa.org/1900

The NFPA *Fifth Needs Assessment of the US Fire Service (2021)* provides comparative data that helps communities understand what similarly sized communities provide for fire protection capabilities. In communities with a population like Wallingford, the following is noted:

- In a population range of 25,000 to 49,999, the average number of engines (pumpers) in service is 3.7. Additionally, it was reported by 73% of those communities that the age of pumpers was 0-14 years old, and in 13%, the age range was 15-19. Wallingford's pumper fleet is just above that with four (4) frontline pumpers. In terms of age, E7 and E8 are 17 years old, and E1 and E2 are 11 and 8 years old, respectively.
- For aerial devices, the average number of in-service units is 1.3 in similar communities. In 63% of those communities, the reported age is between 0-14 years, with 17% reporting ages of 15-19 years old. Wallingford has two (2) aerial devices: E3 (75' quint is 5 years old, and T1 is 15 years old.
- For ambulances, similar communities have an average of 1.8 ambulances in service, with Wallingford being just above that, which is representative of their call volume/service needs. The average age reporting is 92% being 0-14 years of age, which aligns with the age of Wallingford's fleet (Medic A, 9 years old, Medics B & C, each are 8 years old).
- The age of the major firefighting apparatus currently in service ranges from 5 to 30 years of age. The tankers and spare aerial device are 25 and 30 years of age, respectively.

EQUIPMENT

There are no minimum requirements for the type and amount of equipment to be carried on fire apparatus. NFPA 1900 provides a suggested list of equipment, and the ISO rating schedule has a points system based on recommended equipment. Ultimately, it is up to the fire department to determine what equipment is to be provided based on risk and the types of incidents that are anticipated.

The MRI project team found the equipment located on each piece of apparatus in Wallingford to be well-maintained and ready for use. All apparatus had a typical selection of portable hand, power, and service tools and equipment utilized for firefighting and other emergency operations. For the most part, the equipment appears to be organized and serviceable.

Wallingford's self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) inventory is current (2020) and is in compliance with the current NFPA standard. SCBA units appear to be properly maintained and are equipped with an integrated personal alert safety system (PASS) devices. They are equipped

with heads-up displays (HUD) that allow the user to monitor his/her air supply through an electronic display in the wearer's face piece.

Active, interior structural firefighting members of each fire company have been issued their own individual SCBA masks. Many departments issue individual facemasks to minimize the chance of exposure/ transmission of infectious and/or communicable diseases and other illnesses (even the common cold) between members. Each member having their own personal mask also ensures that they are wearing a correctly sized, properly fitting mask, not just the mask that happens to be available. The masks used by Wallingford are sized to each firefighter who has been fit tested. The fire companies maintain a supply of some small and large face masks available for personnel who require one of these non-standard sizes.

The OSHA *Respiratory Protection Standard*, 29 CFR 1910.134, and NFPA Standard 1500, *Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program*, mandate that annual SCBA mask fit testing be completed after personnel have been medically cleared to wear SCBA. WFD conducts annual fit testing in accordance with this requirement.

Annual flow testing of SCBA cylinders is required by NFPA Standard 1970, *Standard on Protective Ensembles for Structural and Proximity Firefighting, Work Apparel, Open-Circuit Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) for Emergency Services, and Personal Alert Safety Systems (PASS)* (2025 edition). The department should ensure that flow testing is completed by an outside vendor, along with necessary hydrostatic testing of SCBA cylinders.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) includes the full ensemble that encapsulates a firefighter who will be engaging in firefighting operations. It includes a helmet, Nomex® hood, turnout coat, turnout pants, boots, SCBA, gloves, and eye protection. The specifications and related requirements for PPE can be found in various NFPA standards. The MRI team examined several sets of firefighter PPE and found them to be relatively clean, and most were in good to very good condition, and within the NFPA/OSHA required 10-year lifespan. Some of the PPE showed the effects of routine wear, but the majority was in good condition. A recommendation would be to work towards each member having two (2) full sets of PPE to reduce exposure to cancer causing contaminates and allow for turnout gear to be washed while still keeping personnel operationally available. At a minimum, each member should be issued two (2) Nomex hoods. With every changing technology, a committee should be formed to periodically conduct wear trials from available vendors to ensure the PPE meets the needs of the department.

An important component of the service life of personal protective equipment, primarily turnout gear, is routine cleaning and inspection. The Wallingford Fire Department should ensure that turnout gear is cleaned twice a year, at a minimum, and after each exposure to the products of combustion or bloodborne pathogens. Wallingford fire stations are each equipped with an industrial washer/extractor for cleaning PPE, and some stations are equipped with dryers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation VII-1: ***A facilities review and capability assessment should be conducted to determine the viability of reoccupying the Cook Hill firehouse and begin to run an ambulance out of this station, with the potential of staffing an additional engine there in the near future.***

Recommendation VII-2 – Action Item: ***The WFD should ensure all buildings are equipped with a full fire alarm and automatic fire sprinkler system. Stations that are staffed 24/7 are eligible for fire protection system funding through the FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant program.***

Recommendation VII-3: ***A comprehensive building maintenance plan, inclusive of capital items and renovations, should be conducted and forecasted for a minimum of 5 years. This will help the department plan and budget for current and future needs.***

Recommendation VII-4: ***In collaboration with the Wallingford Police Department, the WFD should request a physical security analysis of all facilities by the regional protective security advisor (PSA) for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). CISA analyses are provided free of charge and are exempt from FOIA disclosure.***

Recommendation VII-5: ***The Wallingford Department of Public Works should consider certifying one or more vehicle mechanics as an emergency vehicle technician (EVT)[34]. The EVT would be the lead mechanic for repairs and maintenance on the town's emergency vehicles.***

[34] https://www.evtcc.org/

<u>Recommendation VII-6:</u> The WFD should provide each career and volunteer member with two full sets of firefighting PPE (turnout gear). This enables personnel to decontaminate, clean, and dry one set of gear after returning from an incident while remaining in service with the second set of gear. As a minimum, each member should be issued two (2) Nomex hoods for thermal protection and carcinogen particulate blocking.

<u>Recommendation VII-7:</u> The WFD should incorporate a biannual cleaning and inspection process at a minimum for all PPE in accordance with NFPA 1850.

CHAPTER VIII - CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Current State of the Fire and EMS Delivery System

The role of the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department is one of the most fundamental functions of government: to ensure the safety and protection of its residents and visitors. An overarching issue facing Wallingford, as it is for every community, is to determine an acceptable level of risk and then define an appropriate level of service for the community. There is no "right" amount of fire protection or EMS delivery. It is a constantly changing level based upon the expressed needs of the community. Determining the appropriate level of service also involves determining the town's fiscal ability and willingness to pay for the desired level of service. Planned growth of the fire department is essential to provide a consistent service level to the community while keeping pace with increased demands for service. It is the unenviable task of the town councilors and the Mayor to translate those needs into reality, maximize the delivery of fire, rescue, and EMS services, and do it in the most fiscally responsible manner possible.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1750 has been referred to within this study and should be considered by the community as a foundation to determine an acceptable level of service. The recommendations in this report consider applicable NFPA standards, as well as other regulations, such as OSHA.

Based upon the analysis of the current day operations of the WFD, MRI found an organization that is well-equipped with a modern fleet of fire apparatus, ambulances, and support vehicles. The leadership of the department is dedicated to making continual improvements to ensure that dependable, high-quality emergency services continue to be provided to the town. From all accounts, once they arrive on the scene of an emergency, the WFD career and volunteer personnel perform their duties competently and can be counted upon to complete assignments given to them. They should be commended for their efforts and given the support they need to continue being successful.

The department is facing serious challenges both today and looking toward the future. Based on our analysis of the current day operations of the WFD, we have found an organization that is facing numerous challenges. Most department stakeholders believe that there needs to be increased team-based focus, direction, and common vision within the department. The department is at an important crossroads, and now is the time to support changes to the culture

of the department that have been initiated by the current leadership. This will make the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department an even stronger and more progressive organization that is focused on reducing community risks.

During this assessment and our interviews, multiple stakeholders expressed concern relative to the level of internal and external communication. In the past, based on a perceived communication deficit, some fire department personnel and community leaders operated outside the established chain of command to exchange information. These "end runs" around the chain of command can result in a breakdown in organizational discipline. More often than not, the information shared is incomplete, out of context, or based on rumor. Decisions based on faulty information will be harmful to the organization and the town. The town, the department, and its members have a joint responsibility to ensure that a positive culture of respect, professionalism, and visionary action is built and maintained.

Sense of Common Vision

Having a sense of common vision is important in any organization to ensure that the organization and its personnel are moving in unison toward a common goal(s). Having a common vision is not only about making sure that all parties are aware that they are in the same boat and rowing, but even more importantly, that they are rowing in the same direction. The impact of not sharing a common vision will be very noticeable in the quality and quantity of work performed, but also in the spirit and passion with which the work of the organization is accomplished.

The perceptions shared by members of an organization can be extremely important in either establishing or, conversely, distorting that sense of a unified common vision. Whether accurate or not, and regardless of the myriad of factors that can influence them, the individual and shared perceptions of members of an organization can, and often do, become their reality. If there is a perception of distrust or a lack of mutual respect between members of the organization, or between various entities or groups within an organization, the goal of successfully achieving that sense of common vision will be difficult, if not impossible.

As part of this organizational assessment process, MRI interviewed numerous stakeholders from both inside and outside the WFD. The study team spent numerous hours in the town over several days and assessed the attitudes and performance of the members of the WFD. Part of these interviews involved asking for a perspective on what the stakeholders see as the needs of the organization moving forward.

The study team believes that while the fire department is fulfilling its mission and is generally doing so in an adequate manner, it is not planning as well for the future as it should be, or making the most efficient use of its human resources and equipment. The study team did not see a mission statement displayed in the fire station or on the town's website.

It is our opinion that fulfillment of the fire department's mission on a daily basis is more a product of the normal sense of duty, responsibility, and service, that is the very hallmark of the fire and emergency services, and a sense of community pride and involvement, both proud traditions, rather than a clear sense of common vision for the future of the WFD. In addition, the fire department does not currently have a formal vision statement, nor has it developed any core values that will help to drive the organization forward. The fire department's mission statement should be prominently displayed in the fire station along with the vision statement and core values.

The MRI project team is very concerned that our interviews and interactions with the fire department's internal stakeholders indicated little sense of common vision within the department. Multiple stakeholders expressed a perception that the fire department views itself as its own entity, independent and autonomous from the town government.

In addition to the leadership issues identified, the MRI project team was informed during multiple interviews that:

- If any goals and objectives are being established annually or long-range, none of the members interviewed were familiar with them.
- There is a general sense that the culture within the organization needs to change.
- There is a general sense that the shifts all operate very differently in the way the apparatus is staffed, when the apparatus goes to call, or not.
- Training is not taken seriously and is weak.

Many of those we interviewed stated that communication should be enhanced between the levels of the department – firefighters, EMTs, volunteers, officers, and command staff, and between the town administration and the fire department.

In any successful fire department, there must be open and effective lines of communication between the various groups, divisions, and units. All personnel have a major stake in the operation of the department and its level of success. No one person has all the answers, knows everything, or can do it all without assistance. Employees should be empowered, provided with an appropriate *"ownership"* stake, and have duties and authority delegated to them. Recognizing that *"they can very easily fail on their own, but need a lot of assistance from their 'team' to be effective and successful"* has led most successful leaders today to adopt an inclusive style of management and decision making. However, the leadership team must not be afraid to set up and make the difficult decisions that are in the best interests of the organization and its customers rather than the self-interests of the individual entities.

A few of the department's long-serving members expressed skepticism that anything would be done as a result of this report. They informed the project team that several other studies have been completed over the years, only to be shelved because certain people did not like or agree with what they said. This is a perception that the town will only be able to prove incorrect by truly using this report for what it is intended to be…a roadmap for moving the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department forward.

Strategic Planning: Looking to the Future

Strategic planning is an organization's process of defining its direction and making decisions relative to the optimization of limited resources. A strategic plan also contains tools that can guide the implementation of the strategy. Strategic planning became prominent in corporations during the 1960s and remains an important aspect of organizational planning.

Fire and rescue operations and service delivery can be dramatically improved in departments that commit resources to goal setting, master planning, risk assessment, and performance measurement. A number of tools and resources are available to guide management in these efforts from organizations such as the US Fire Administration (USFA), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE), the Connecticut Firefighting Academy, U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), the Connecticut State Fire Marshal, and Connecticut Emergency Medical Service.

Performance measures should be easily understood and easily calculated. Suggested performance measures for the fire and emergency services often have a range depending on

local factors. The point of the performance measures is to identify the community's expectations in a quantifiable way and to use the measurement of fire and EMS performance against these objectives to identify areas that may need improvement or require additional resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation VIII-1: ***Regardless of which recommendations contained within this report the Town of Wallingford ultimately decides to implement, an inclusive, team-based approach will be essential to successfully moving the fire department forward and ensuring the town continues to be able to maintain a strong, dedicated, and vibrant combination fire and emergency services department.***

Recommendation VIII-2: ***Based upon the recommendations contained in this report, the Town of Wallingford and WFD should develop a formal process for implementing a long-term vision and strategic plan for the fire and emergency services department. The development of the long-range strategic plan should involve both internal and external stakeholders, including members of the public. It should be updated annually.***

Recommendation VIII-3: ***The WFD's mission statement should be reviewed and updated to properly and accurately reflect the department's overall mission within the community. In addition, a vision statement along with a set of core values should be developed by utilizing the input of a cross-section of department stakeholders. Although this can be a time-consuming process, it serves as a foundation to bridge divided loyalties and set a common direction for the organization.***

The Department's current mission statement is:

> ***The mission of the Wallingford Department of Fire and Emergency Services is to serve our community with knowledge, compassion, ethics, and pride and to provide a range of programs to the Town of Wallingford designed to protect lives, property, businesses, and the environment from the adverse effects of fires, medical emergencies, or exposure to dangerous conditions created by people or nature.***

We offer the following sample mission statement, vision statement, and core values statement as a starting point for the department to consider:

<u>Sample Mission Statement</u>

The Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services Department is dedicated to protecting the lives, property, and environment of our community through professional excellence in fire suppression, advanced emergency medical care, technical rescue, and risk reduction. As a unified combination department, we are committed to delivering compassionate, timely, and effective service to all residents with integrity and pride.

<u>Sample Vision Statement</u>

To be a premier, community-centered public safety agency recognized for our operational readiness and unwavering commitment to service. We will achieve this by fostering a culture of continuous improvement, embracing innovation in training and technology, and empowering our diverse team of career and volunteer professionals to meet the evolving needs of a vibrant and growing Wallingford.

<u>Sample Core Values</u>

Unity: Fostering teamwork and respect between all members, career, and volunteer

Integrity: Adhering to the highest ethical standards in our service to the public

Compassion: Treating every patient and resident with dignity and care

Readiness: Dedicating ourselves to continuous training and preparedness

<u>Recommendation VIII-4:</u> The WFD mission statement, vision statement, and core values should be prominently displayed in the fire stations and reviewed with all personnel at least annually.

<u>Recommendation VIII-5:</u> WFD should institute a formal internal communications process to ensure that all employees are receiving current, accurate information about department activities, events, personnel matters (promotional opportunities, promotions, transfers, etc.), policy and procedure changes, etc. Communications could include:

- ***Department newsletter (electronic and/or print)***
- ***General orders***
- ***Training bulletins***
- ***Email***
- ***Text messages***
- ***Messaging via smartphone apps such as I Am Responding***

<u>Recommendation VIII-6:</u> The fire chief should convene command staff (deputy chiefs and battalion chiefs) meetings on a regular basis, no less than quarterly. These meetings can focus on strategic planning, operational coordination, budget planning, and other organizational priorities. Meetings should have a formal agenda and minutes.

<u>Recommendation VIII-7</u>: The fire chief should convene meetings with the senior officers of the volunteer fire companies on a regular basis (no less than quarterly). These meetings can focus on strategic planning, operational coordination, budget planning, volunteer recruitment and retention, and other organizational priorities. Meetings should have a formal agenda and minutes.

<u>Recommendation VIII-8:</u> The fire chief should implement bimonthly group meetings with each on-duty shift and semi-annual department meetings (voluntary for off-duty personnel) where he can provide updates to members of the department, recognize significant accomplishments by the department and individual members, answer questions, take suggestions, and provide an open forum for the sharing of information between all personnel. The meetings should have a formal agenda and meeting minutes. The meeting minutes should be distributed to the entire department.

<u>Recommendation VIII-9:</u> The Town of Wallingford and the WFD should publicly recognize the achievements of the department and individual members in reaching the various established goals as they are accomplished.

CONCLUSION

Overall, and despite any shortcomings and the challenges it is facing, the WFD appears to have a positive public image and is respected for its long-standing service to the community. This is commendable. If the recommendations contained in this report are implemented, those levels of service will only improve to the ultimate benefit of every citizen of, and visitor to, the Town of Wallingford. **However, we must stress one final time that it is imperative that a sense of unity and common vision be instilled within the Wallingford Fire and Emergency Services department. It is mission critical that not only must everyone in the department be in the same boat regarding where the department is heading, they must also be rowing in unison and in the same direction toward those common goals and objectives. It is the collaborative job of the town's governing body and fire department leadership to oversee and continue to guide these efforts.**

This report should be studied and considered in its entirety to gain a complete picture of MRI's recommendations and the rationale behind them. While the recommendations are numbered in each section, for the most part, they have NOT been listed in any preferential manner or order of importance. The numbering is for reference purposes only.

The areas that need improvement are by no means insurmountable or beyond the town and its leadership's ability to deal with them. However, there are some significant issues that are facing the WFD. Town and fire department leaders may collectively develop their own priorities or modify the recommendations based on the ever-changing needs of the town and the fire department. They must also collectively coordinate and prioritize solutions based on time, personnel, and fiscal realities.

In order to address the recommendations that have been identified in this report, the town and its fire and emergency services department leadership should:

1. Consider this report as a guide and a tool.

2. Approach recommendations strategically and systematically.

3. Break them down into reasonably sized components. Categorize them as short-term and long-term and/or high-priority and low-priority. This will allow a clear implementation plan to emerge that considers things such as which items can be accomplished within

existing resources, and which items will require additional funding and/or time to accomplish in the coming years.

4. Use this document as a roadmap to guide change and improvement within the department focused on service enhancement.

5. Use them as the basis for the development of a long-range strategic plan for change and improvement.

6. Refer to specifics within this report when initiating discussions, check recommendations off as they are accomplished, revise the plan as necessary moving forward just making sure to maintain forward progress, and most importantly, recognize the positive achievements publicly.

APPENDIX A

Municipal
Resources, Inc.

APPENDIX A - THE PROJECT TEAM

The MRI project team consisted of the following personnel:

Director of Fire Services:

Brian P. Duggan, Director Fire Services Group, retired from the Fire Department in Northampton, Massachusetts, where he instituted substantial changes to modernize and restructure the entire Department, including equipment, facilities, personnel, and training. In conjunction with his staff, Brian integrated Emergency Medical Services (EMS) into the organization and created a regional Advanced Life Support (ALS) Program that currently serves 18 communities within the Northampton Area. He formerly commanded the Northborough, Massachusetts, Fire Department and has significant experience with the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services, where over three decades, he held several key positions. Following his retirement, Brian has continued his active fire service involvement by serving as both a volunteer chief fire officer and through continuing to develop training and certification programs as a program Coordinator for the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services.

Mr. Duggan developed and directed the Graduate and Undergraduate Fire Science Programs at Anna Maria College in Paxton, Massachusetts, from 1995 - 2003. Mr. Duggan has a Business Management/Fire Science degree from Providence College and a Master's Degree of Business Administration (MBA) from Nichols College in Dudley, Massachusetts. He is also a graduate of the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer Program and the Senior Executive Program for State and Local Leaders at Harvard University. In December 2012, Mr. Duggan received a Master's Degree in Homeland Security through the Naval Post Graduate School based in Monterey, California, where his thesis entitled "*Enhancing Decision-making during the First Operational Period of Surge Events"* was selected as an outstanding thesis. He was one of the first fire service professionals to be designated as a Chief Fire Officer by the Commission on Fire Accreditation International.

Brian led the Massachusetts fire service through his affiliation as Chairman of the Fire Chief Association of Massachusetts Technology Committee and as a Regional Director on the Massachusetts State Fire Mobilization Committee. Mr. Duggan has authored several publications, inclusive of writing Section 7, Chapter 3, Fire Department Information Systems, in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Editions of the National Fire Protection Association's Fire Protection Handbook. Chief Duggan has been affiliated with MRI as a subject matter advisor

since 2002, and he has served as Director of Fire Services since 2015. Currently, Mr. Duggan is regarded as an expert specific to fire service response to photovoltaic and battery energy storage system (BESS) emergencies. He has developed several nationwide training programs providing first responders with new insight on these emerging challenges.

Team Leader:

David Houghton is a devoted fire and emergency management professional who has recently retired from the Wayland, Massachusetts, Fire Department after a distinctive 38-year career, from being a call firefighter and rising through the ranks to Fire Chief. Along with dedicating his service to the Town of Wayland, he continues to work for the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services as both an instructor and in the Special Operations Division, doing special projects. In 1999, he was given the challenge by the State Fire Marshal to develop and implement what today is known as Special Operations. This development included designing, building, and implementing specialized equipment and staffing to respond to Emergency and planned incidents throughout the Commonwealth. This program was a shared vision between David and the Fire Marshal, and today has been shared in whole or in part in other areas of the country. David has a B.S. degree in Fire Science, an A.S. Degree in Fire Science and Technology, and has completed a Local Government and Management program with Suffolk University and the Massachusetts Municipal Association. David has a diverse background in Firefighting, EMS (ALS and BLS), Dispatch, Fire Prevention, Emergency Management, and operations. He is a nationally certified Firefighter, Fire instructor, Fire Inspector, and Fire Officer. He is a certified Emergency Medical Technician both at the National Level and in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

David has most recently continued his fire service career by being appointed as a call firefighter with the Town of Moultonborough Fire Rescue and is a certified New Hampshire Emergency Medical Technician. He continues to be active with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Fire and Ambulance Mobilization team in the continuous updating and redevelopment of the program. Prior to his retirement as Fire Chief, David was an active member in the Massachusetts Fire District 14, where he was a driving force behind the creation of the District Operational budget, an operation manual, and the formalizing of the various specialized teams within the District. David was also selected as the Chief overseeing the Fire District communications team and equipment, as well as serving on several other progressive programs within the District. He is a member of the Fire Chiefs Association of Massachusetts and the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Team Members:

Eric Heath is a 30-year veteran of the fire service, beginning his fire service career in 1994 as a volunteer for the Enfield Fire District in Enfield, Connecticut. He has been a career firefighter for the Southington Fire Department (CT) since 1999 and currently serves as the Fire Chief and Fire Marshal for the Southington Fire Department, with both operational and administrative responsibility. He is also the appointed Deputy Emergency Management Director for the Town of Southington. Eric has been the principal grant writer of the Southington Fire Department since 2012, securing approximately $2.5M in grant awards for training, equipment, and manpower.

Eric graduated from the University of New Haven in 2011 with a Bachelor's Degree in Fire Service Administration, and from Columbia Southern University in 2015 with a Master's Degree in Emergency Services Management. In 2023, he graduated from Columbia Southern University with a Master's in Public Administration. Eric also completed the Executive Fire Officer program through the National Fire Academy in 2019. He is a certified Fire Marshal, ProBoard/IFSAC Fire Investigator, and ProBoard/IFSAC certified Fire Officer 4. He is also a credentialed Chief Fire Officer (CFO) from the Center for Public Safety Excellence.

Eric was honorably discharged from the United States Army Reserve as a Civil Affairs Specialist in 2001. He is a member of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (New England, EFO, and VCOS divisions), International Association of Emergency Managers, Connecticut Fire Chiefs Association, Connecticut Fire Marshal's Association, Connecticut Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators, and the Connecticut Fire Department Instructors' Association.

Donald P. Bliss is a subject-matter expert providing support for the project teams at Municipal Resources, Inc. (MRI), a municipal management consulting firm based in Plymouth, NH. He retired in July 2019 as vice president for field operations at the National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, where he oversaw NFPA's international division and NFPA's regional operations in the U.S. and Canada. NFPA is a worldwide leader in fire, electrical, building, and life safety. The mission of the international non-profit, non-government organization founded in 1896 is to eliminate deaths, injury, property, and economic loss due to fire, electrical, and other hazards by providing and advocating consensus codes and standards, research, training, and education; and by partnering with others who share an interest in furthering the NFPA mission.

Prior to joining NFPA, Bliss was a senior project manager and public safety consultant with MRI, participating in numerous fire department assessments and fire chief recruitments. He also chaired various technical committees at NFPA, including the technical committee on cultural

resources. He served on the NFPA board of directors, NFPA Standards Council, and the Fire Protection Research Foundation board of trustees.

From 2003 to 2012, he served as the director of the NI2 Center for Infrastructure Expertise, a not-for-profit applied research group based in Portsmouth, NH, dedicated to strengthening the security and resiliency of the nation's built critical infrastructure and key resources. Bliss was responsible for managing federal and state-funded projects that included the Canada-US Cargo Security Project, the CARVER2® critical infrastructure risk assessment tool, the SMART School Tool®, and an in-depth assessment of cross-border critical infrastructure protection and emergency response capabilities between the US and Canada.

Bliss served as the New Hampshire State Fire Marshal from 1992 until 2003, responsible for overseeing fire investigations; fire, building, and electrical code enforcement; and public fire safety education efforts throughout the state. He has served as president of the New Hampshire Association of Fire Chiefs, the New England Association of Fire Chiefs, and the National Association of State Fire Marshals, and chair of the NH EMS Coordinating Board. In the wake of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, he took over responsibility for New Hampshire's emergency management and homeland security efforts. He also served as homeland security advisor to both Governor Jeanne Shaheen and Governor Craig Benson.

From 1983 to 1992, Bliss served as the fire chief in Salem, New Hampshire. From 1989 to 1992, he served as both fire chief and the town's emergency management director. From 1980 to 1983, Bliss served as the director of the University of Connecticut Fire Department and as fire marshal for the University of Connecticut System. He began his career with the Durham-UNH Fire Department in 1970, rising from call firefighter to fire marshal/deputy chief. During his time in Durham, he also volunteered as an EMT with the Durham Ambulance Corps (now known as McGregor EMS) and served in various leadership positions, including president.

Bliss has served as a subject matter expert on critical infrastructure protection with the Mobile Education Team of the Center for Homeland Defense Studies at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School and was an adjunct professor in the graduate public administration program at the University of New Hampshire. He is the immediate past chair of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Advisory Council, is a Senior Distinguished Fellow at Northeastern University's Global Resilience Institute, and serves on the board of directors of McGregor EMS in Durham, NH.

Bliss received a Bachelor of Arts in political science from the University of New Hampshire in 1973 and a Master of Public Administration degree, also from the University of New Hampshire, in 1979. He has completed numerous courses at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland.