

Update on Mandatory Firefighter NFPA Certification and 2024 Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment – December 2024

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Report Summary

This report provides information regarding the status of volunteer recruitment, the retention activities and the City's progress in meeting firefighter certification requirements found within O. Reg 343/22 Fire Fighter Certification.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report refers to operational matters and has no direct connection to the Community Energy and Emissions Plan.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Background

Review of Volunteer Firefighter 2024 Recruitment and Retention

Fire Services undertakes volunteer recruitment annually and has accepted Volunteer Firefighter (VFF) recruitment applications year-round for several years. Since the closure of the 2023/2024 VFF recruitment, 131 applications were received and processed. Forty-eight applicants did not reside in a volunteer district, reducing the number of applicants to eighty-three. All applicants were then vetted to ensure they met the minimum position requirements. Twenty-one applicants either withdrew or did not respond to our phone calls, and fifty-six applicants were scheduled for physical testing.

The physical fitness test was revised to best reflect the actual work a firefighter would be required to complete when responding to an emergency incident. The revised physical test was trialed by ten of our volunteer firefighters. All candidates were emailed the revised physical testing requirements as part of the recruitment information guide. This information assists new recruits in preparing for the physical testing component of the recruitment process. Physical testing was divided into two groups and took place over two days, with a third date scheduled as a makeup date. There were twenty-five active volunteer firefighters and officers who participated and assisted with the physical testing process, which included providing information,

guidance, and encouragement.

To ensure the health and safety of each participant, blood pressure (150/100) and heart rate (100bpm) limits were monitored in accordance with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) requirements, prior to and following the physical testing. During testing, two individuals failed their blood pressure and were asked to follow up with a physician and invited back on the makeup date, at which point they both passed. One other candidate failed their blood pressure testing, was referred to a physician and was not able to complete the physical testing. A total of forty-seven candidates successfully advanced to the interview stage of the recruitment process.

The interview panel consisted of a Deputy Fire Chief, Business Services Coordinator, and a Volunteer Captain. Interviews were conducted mostly in person with a virtual option over a three-week period. Volunteer Captains are now trained in interviews and able to actively participate in the process. Following the interview stage of the process, offer letters were provided to thirty-nine applicants.

The thirty-nine applicants were required to be split into two groups to attend certification training to adhere to the required Training Officer/Recruit span of control. Unfortunately, five of the thirty-nine recruits that signed offer letters have since resigned leaving thirty-four active recruits. The main reason identified for resigning from the fire services is due to their primary work schedules were too demanding and they would not be able to make the commitment to attend the training.

Volunteer recruitment shall continue annually. Recruitment in 2025 will focus on those stations with low volunteer firefighter numbers. This station specific focus will assist in addressing concerns relating to a single firefighter response by increasing the number of responders on a first arriving apparatus while providing an overall increase to effective fireground operations.

Volunteer Recruitment Committee

Over the last three years, Greater Sudbury Fire Services (GSFS) has remained committed to meeting with our Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment Committee, consisting of members from Fire Administration, Communications, Human Resources and Organizational Development, as well as volunteer firefighters chosen by the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC). The goal of this committee is to develop strategies to attract new volunteer recruits. One of the ideas brought forth by the committee, and implemented this year, was open houses at the fire halls to promote volunteer recruitment and provide information and guidance to potential applicants. Fire Administration has also committed to creating a new video for the website using video and drone footage from the physical fitness testing trials. The committee met in October to review the 2024 volunteer firefighter recruitment and plan for the 2025 volunteer recruitment. A new initiative that was brought forward was to provide the opportunity for potential applicants the opportunity to attend a fire station and meet with a Station Captain anytime throughout the year to provide a station tour and answer any questions the applicant may have about becoming a volunteer firefighter.

For additional information on previous volunteer recruitment initiatives and information, please refer to the report titled "Update on Mandatory Firefighter NFPA Certification and 2024 Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment – June 2024", presented at the June 25, 2024, City Council Meeting.

We continue to participate with the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs' recruitment and retention committee to identify and develop new initiatives to assist Fire Services with all aspects of recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Fire Administration has recently met with two comparable Fire Services with similar staffing models for the purpose of reviewing and discussing current recruitment and retention initiatives of each department and to identify new opportunities to increase volunteer recruitment and retention. During these meetings, it was recognized that Fire Services across Ontario are all dealing with the same volunteer recruitment and retention issues, and the concerns identified are not unique to GSFS.

Part 2: Mandatory Certification Training

On July 1, 2022, the Government of Ontario passed O. Reg. 343/22 Firefighter Certification which outlines the mandatory minimum standards and job performance requirements for all firefighters. For additional information pertaining to O. Reg. 343/22 certification and training requirements, please refer to the report titled “Update on Mandatory Firefighter NFPA Certification and 2023 Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment”, presented at the December 5, 2023 City Council Meeting and the report titled “Update on Mandatory Firefighter NFPA Certification and the report titled “2024 Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment – June 2024”, presented at the June 25, 2024 City Council Meeting.

The three NFPA 1001- Level 1 courses conducted in 2024 were specific to new volunteer recruitment training programs. Between the first two courses that were delivered, there were 30 recruit volunteer firefighters that completed all ten days of training and participated in provincial certification testing. Recruit volunteers in 2023 were 100% successful. We are waiting for the testing results for group one of the 2024 recruits. There are 20 recruits assign to group B that began training in November and will complete training May 4, 2025, with certification testing occurring May 10, 2025

The three NFPA 1001- Level 2 courses that were conducted in 2024 were offered to all existing volunteers who were certified or participating in a current NFPA 1001-01 program. Between the first two courses that were delivered, there are 35 volunteer firefighters that completed all ten days of training and participated in provincial certification testing. Certification testing results was 82% success rate. Volunteers who were unsuccessful in certification testing, were provided another opportunity to write the provincial exam. Although there were twenty volunteers that started the third course, when the course was completed by October 19, 2024, there were eight volunteers who completed all ten days of training and were put forward for certification testing. We are currently waiting on the testing results of the 3rd NFPA 1001- Level 2 program and NFPA 1001- Level 1 (rewrite).

The Fire Services Training Section completed the following six certification courses in 2024 as follows:

2024 NFPA Training Academies (Volunteer)		
1001 - Firefighter I	3	30 Training Days = 300 hrs.
1001 - Firefighter II	3	30 Training Days = 300 hrs.
Total for 2024	6	60 Training Days = 600 hrs.

Certification Overview for Volunteer Firefighters

The chart below reflects the status of our firefighter’s certification training by NFPA Certification Program. Each firefighter must successfully complete each program before moving onto the next.

NFPA Standard	Certified	Enrolled in Training	Test Results Pending
1001 - Firefighter Level I	137	21	21
1001 - Firefighter Level II	102	23	13
1002 - Firefighter Apparatus/Driver***	5	40	0
1072 - Hazmat Awareness	96	21	14
1072 - Hazmat Operations	44	21	13

*** Registration for 1002 course closes on December 31, 2024, which should see an increase in enrollment in training. Numbers reflected in the chart were accurate as of November 18, 2024.

There are currently 39 VFFs who are neither certified nor have they signed up to participate in certification training, this includes 11 who are on an approved leave of absence (LOA), a training plan will need to be developed on a case-by-case basis upon the individuals return to work. Of the remaining 28 VFFs, there are 22 that currently do not have a planned pathway forward to achieve certification, we have contacted each of the 22 individuals to determine their individual path to achieve certification. In our continued efforts to provide some flexibility we requested a primary employment schedule to evaluate opportunities for additional (daytime) certification training dates. Unfortunately, there were no weekday training opportunities identified based upon the employment schedules submitted.

2025 Volunteer Certification Training Calendar

The 2025 certification training calendar will be the most demanding since the implementation of our new training programs. Fire Services will need to deliver the following courses in 2025 in order to meet the certification requirements by July 1, 2026.

2025 NFPA Training Academies (Volunteer)		
NFPA Certification Courses	# of Courses	# of Days/Hrs. to Provide Specific Courses
1001 - Firefighter I	2	17 Training Days = 170hrs
1001 - Firefighter II	2	20 Training Days = 200 hrs.
1002 - Firefighter Apparatus/Driver	10	50 Training Days = 500 hrs.
1041 - Fire Service Instructor Level 1	1	4 Training Days = 40 hrs.
1021 - Fire Officer Professional Qualifications	1	4 Training Days = 40 hrs.
Total for 2025	16	95 Training Days = 950hrs

See Appendix A for the 2025 annual certification training calendar for volunteer firefighters.

Although there is a significant increase in the number of certification training hours from 2024 to 2025, the ability to meet the additional hours will be offset by the additional two training officers that were hired in September of 2024 to increase the capacity of the Training Section. Since most certification training dates are scheduled on weekends to accommodate volunteers' primary employment, Fire Administration will be meeting with staff from the Training Section regularly to ensure they are not being over utilized or facing burnout from the work-life imbalance due to the considerable number of training weekends required in 2025.

Conclusion

The 2025 volunteer certification training calendar is the most aggressive since the implementation of O. Reg 343/22 for both volunteers and training officers, as the demand to complete courses and achieve certification has increased with the deadline of July 1, 2026, quickly approaching. The certification training provided by GSFS Training Section over the past two years has been instrumental in enhancing the knowledge, competence, and confidence of volunteers in their skill and abilities, ensuring that those volunteers who are committed to training obtain their firefighter certification within the regulated timeline. Fire Services will continue to provide multiple opportunities, giving volunteers the best chance to achieve certification.

The effort, commitment and achievement of the volunteer firefighters and training officers that are participating in these training courses is recognized and appreciated by Fire Administration. Although the demand of attending full-day weekend training can sometimes feel overwhelming, volunteers participating in the certification training have recognized significant benefits. The training enhances their confidence and competence in the role of a volunteer firefighter, enabling them to deliver the highest level of service to the citizens of Greater Sudbury.

The positive training experience can be confirmed through the quotes below that were provided to the Chief Training Officer from volunteers who have participated and completed the GSFS certification training.

“There are many of us that have come out of this training having learned a lot. I have increased confidence in my abilities as a firefighter to be able to provide the services that the citizens of Sudbury expect. I believe many others who have completed the program feel the same way.” (VFF Station 16)

“This has been an amazing experience so far and very rewarding.” (VFF Station 16)

“This training is awesome, thank you very much, and thank you to the Training Division for putting in the time to train all of us and the time all of you have been away from your families, on behalf of me this is greatly appreciated” (VFF Station 10)

Resources Cited

[O. Reg. 343/22 Firefighter Certification](#)

[Update on Mandatory Firefighter NFPA Certification and 2024 Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment – June 2024 \(escribemeeting.com\)](#)

[Update on Mandatory Firefighter NFPA Certification and 2023 Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment \(escribemeetings.com\)](#)

[Greater Sudbury Fire Services – 2022 Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment Update \(escribemeetings.com\)](#)