



Bureau of Fire
Fire Chief David Nelson

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HONOR, COMMITMENT,
DEDICATION



David Nelson Fire Chief, 31 yrs. of service
Whitehall Bureau of Fire, Serving Whitehall Township
989 calls a year covering 12.89 square miles. The target hazards for Whitehall Township include, One gasoline with three 500,000-gallon tanks and one natural gas terminals. The largest mall in the county (The Lehigh Valley Mall). Interstate 22 and Hwy 145 (2 to 3 lane roads). Whitehall High school as well as Middle school and two elementary. As well as natural hazards to include flooding and winter storm.

The Whitehall Bureau of Fire is 90% Funded through the Township the other 10% coming from the Firefighters Relief Association, the Firefighter Association, and fund raising.

As I am sure you our aware, In Northeast Pennsylvania the decline of the Volunteer Firefighter has dropped from approximately 300,000 to 30,000. Recruitment and retentions are one of the major challenges within our department. It has become increasingly more difficult to recruit younger Firefighters. If we do acquire them, it is usually for a short period of time before they head off to college or their perspective careers. If they do stay past this time, there will come a time as they become married and start to have a family of their own. The member will ultimately become more consumed with their family, respectfully so. Most younger families work multiple jobs to make ends meet. If we do get them back after this time. It is not usually in the same capacity as in the past. We also have concerns for their training levels that they can give to the department. Daytime staffing is extremely low in all areas of the state. It is extremely important that we support initiatives SR6 to ensure minimum Fire and EMS coverage through government partnership. By allowing this we could form county wide fire departments that could combine resources. This would include apparatus, personnel and equipment. Cutting cost to the local entity's and providing more manpower and alleviating duplicated resources.

Departments are struggling to be able to purchase Personnel Protective Equipment at a cost of \$7500.00 a firefighter as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars for vehicles with extremely minimal returns on resell of the vehicles. Obtaining quality, as well as certifications for their member to be properly trained to respond to emergency incidents and mitigate them professionally. All of this takes time.

Between two jobs, family, and training as well as responding to calls this leaves very little time for volunteers to fundraise. Most Volunteer Firefighters did not join the fire department to fund raise they do it to make themselves and their communities safer.

Insurance billing for fire departments is a drastic need for not only volunteers but career departments to sustain an all hazards mitigation department, that is expected from our community and State. Just think about who you call in an emergency. If an electrical line is down, if there is a house fire. If your family member is entrapped inside a vehicle, the river has flooded the banks and you are trapped, as well as Hazardous materials incidents all of these are tasks completed by Fire departments across the state. Without these funds, our struggling Career and Volunteer Fire department will have to cut services or cut training and equipment making these tasks extremely dangerous for the Firefighters that are already responding to a dangerous situation.

Our department currently bills insurances for our responses to incidents. Utilizing these funds in for our training grounds. Our department has the only live fire training facility within the Lehigh County. This facility not only benefits our department but all the County and surrounding county departments in training. We recently needed substantial repairs to this facility. Without these funds we would not have been able to repair the facilities, and this would be extremely detrimental to the local and surrounding fire services in their live fire training.

I strongly urge you to support and pass HB 759, For the career and volunteer Fire departments with the addition of more updated billing charges vs. the Stafford Act.