So Much More than an Ambulance...

Northwest Harris County has an unusually high population density for a large, unincorporated area. “The population of the area served by CCEMS is comparable to that of a city like Baltimore or Philadelphia,” notes Bradley England, Executive Director for the award winning Cypress Creek Emergency Medical Services. Yet, without a city government to plan and deliver critical services, residents depend on different organizations to provide fire protection, emergency medical services, and law enforcement protection.

One key to coordinating services, according to England, is the CCEMS Communication (Comm) Center physically located inside the Administrative Complex in Spring. Currently, the Comm Center dispatches ten area fire departments, four EMS agencies, the Harris County Fire Marshal’s office, the Harris County Hazardous Materials Team, and Blue Bonnet Critical Incident Stress Management.

Chief Fred Windisch, Ponderosa Fire Department, explains that the high-tech CommCenter epitomizes the kind of cooperation and collaboration needed to sustain the highest quality emergency service dispatch. “Knowing that the CCEMS professionals are there to handle the thousands of calls for help...and to get them routed to the right response teams...makes all of our jobs easier. That level of confidence allows all of us to perform at our best.”

CCEMS opened the present Comm Center in 2009. The new facility added dispatch ability to accommodate not only the present call volume, but also to handle anticipated population growth. During 2011, the Communications Center dispatched over 58,000 calls, with over 31,000 of those being EMS calls. By 2020, those numbers are expected to nearly double.

Commitment to Excellence...

We are pleased to highlight the superior Cypress Creek EMS organization and professionals in our newsletter. There has been a long and mutually beneficial relationship between our agencies and we are proud that, once again, CCEMS has been recognized at the national level for management excellence. An independent panel of judges selected Cypress Creek EMS as one of the Principal Financial Group’s 10 Best Companies for Employee Financial Security -- 2012. Ten growing businesses earned national recognition for linking employee health to employee long-term financial security. The winning companies recognize the critical tie between physical health and future financial health and have expanded the range of benefits designed to keep employees well.
The Chief’s Corner...

We continue to be committed to our goal of providing you with best service possible. It has been our mantra since day one that we will meet or exceed your expectations. I rarely receive complaints, but very often receive compliments and that’s what keep our wheels greased. Our staff sincerely appreciates your support. I do, too.

During these difficult economic times, we have been challenged with less revenue as a consequence of lower value properties on the tax rolls. We supplemented (with your support) the decline in revenue with the one cent sales tax election last year, and that has allowed our revenue to return to 2009 levels. There were real concerns prior to the election about the possibility of reduced services, but thanks to your support, we have prevailed.

As you read this newsletter, please start with the excellent story about Cypress Creek EMS. We interact with them on a daily basis, serving you, as first responders. It appears it will be necessary for Emergency Services District 11 (Cypress Creek EMS) to ask for your support during an election next May to raise their “tax cap”. The District has never had an increase in their initial tax rate of $0.03/100 valuation and expenses threaten to exceed the revenue at this level. This is NOT asking for authority to immediately raise this level…but for the ability to do so within new parameters.

The hard cold reality is that their top notch emergency medical service is stressed due to massive increases in population growth in the service area resulting in increased emergency responses. Add to the mix is the difficulty of collecting insurance and Medicare has once again reduced the amount provided for EMS services. The “double whammy” is huge and they will need your continued support.

A National Perspective...

I am doing a study of costs associated with fire and EMS services in our area compared to what is experienced across the country. At this point of the research, I have found that the cost to provide our services compared to what it costs in areas with similar populations is running at about 38%. This one statistic tells a strong story about our ability to make the most of our funding…and to operate cost effectively. More to follow about this research project…

We hope you have a great year, be careful during the upcoming holiday season, and never forget that we are here for you.

Do you know about CERT?

P-Fire CERT is now an official subsidiary of the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Association, Inc. and the Harris County Citizen Corps. Congratulations to these very dedicated individuals.

Kira Newsome (Cypresswood) has been selected as the chairperson, and Roger Lyon (Ponderosa) as the vice chair. We are developing operating protocols, additional training and dispatch via texting.

A Community Emergency Response Team is critical to our area in that emergency services may be stressed past the breaking point during disaster type situations. We believe we have the talent and the commitment within our fire district to maintain and grow PFire-CERT, so please visit the Harris County CERT website for further information; www.harriscountycitizencorps.com and click on the CERT button.
**Feature Article...**

**WHEN SECONDS COUNT -- COUNT ON US!**

**Life.** No matter the type of disaster or emergency, the scope of a tragedy is often measured in the number of lives saved. Whether the event is a hurricane, a fire, or a heart attack, we celebrate survival. Since it was founded in 1975, Cypress Creek Emergency Medical Services has worked to protect the FM 1960 community by not only saving lives but also by making its service area a safer place to live.

CCEMS started out over thirty five years ago as the logical response of a community to tragedy: a neighbor’s heart attack…delayed treatment…and the resulting death of a resident and friend. Convinced that the death might have been avoided by faster emergency medical services, local residents organized a small ambulance service. Completely staffed by volunteers, the new CCEMS organization operated one ambulance dedicated to serving the local area.

In the last three decades, the delivery of emergency medical services has become a more complex task than the original organizers could ever have anticipated. Paralleling local population growth, CCEMS has continually renewed its mission and transformed itself to meet the challenges of 21st century life on the edge of one of the nation’s largest cities. Today, it is considered a model for EMS operations throughout the country, and other emergency service providers have adopted progressive procedures and medical protocols pioneered by CCEMS.

**Pre-Hospital Care**

Residents of the area covered by Ponderosa Fire Department are fortunate that world-class medical care is virtually on their doorstep. Excellent facilities for pediatric, orthopedic, neurologic, cardiac, and cancer treatment are located within a short distance of the FM 1960 area. However, until you’re the one experiencing an emergency, it is easy to overlook a critical component of community medical care for which you cannot make an appointment.

In a heart-pounding emergency, we dial 911, encouraged by the soothing voice that prompts an explanation of the emergency…reassured that the responders be well-trained, confident, well-equipped and arrive quickly. You may not realize that the call for help will be routed through the Cypress Creek EMS Communications Center, to dispatch its nationally recognized responders.

**The Heart of the Community**

One of CCEMS’ strengths lies in its ongoing efforts to incorporate the best possible medical science with best EMS practice. For example, the organization continually tests strategies and equipment with the goal of improving the survival rates for heart attack victims. In the process, CCEMS developed an extraordinary protocol for responding to the most serious type of heart attack.

Quickly reestablishing circulation is essential to patients surviving and returning to normal function after heart attacks. CCEMS public education and training efforts have made it more likely that area patients will immediately receive basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) even as a 911 call is being placed. First responders who may reach a patient first carry AEDs (automatic external defibrillators) and they are trained to begin treatment.

Once the ambulance arrives, the emergency medical team initiates or takes over the life saving measures. CCEMS constantly assesses the most promising procedures and equipment. For instance, in 2005, paramedics began using ResQPOD™, a device which enhances blood flow to the heard during ventilation. Subsequently, CCEMS has demonstrated significant increases in the spontaneous circulation in cardiac arrest victims, and has published its data through collaborative groups and professional journals.

The EMS team transfers the patient from manual CPR to an automated device called LUCAS as soon as a field supervisor arrives. LUCAS was adopted because it mechanically delivers more consistent CPR chest compressions than are humanly possible. It calibrates itself for maximum accuracy, and it tirelessly performs perfect chest compressions until care is transferred to the hospital emergency room. From its original trial in 2007, LUCAS has become an essential tool in emergency cardiac care, and CCEMS is working toward equipping every

*Continued on page 5*
There is a referendum on the November 6, 2012 ballot that you probably know little, if anything, about. Are you aware that those of us who live in the unincorporated areas of Harris County – including the residents of our fire district -- pay a one cent sales tax to the Metropolitan Transit Authority for a general mobility fund (GMF)? On Election Day, we’ll have the opportunity to vote to **approve or disapprove** continuing the program in its current form which allocates a quarter of the 1-cent sales tax among its 16 member jurisdictions (the City of Houston, Harris County and 14 multi-cities (i.e., cities of Humble, Jersey Village, etc).

There has been considerable ongoing discussion about how this funding should be used, and local meetings were held to obtain input on crafting the November referendum. Basically, the member cities have spent this 25 percent of sales tax collections for various transportation projects and road improvements – not on mass transit. At one point in the discussions, METRO sided with the City of Houston favoring a proposal to allow the majority of funds to go to the City of Houston. However, our Harris County leadership struck a compromise with METRO that would continue the allocations pretty much as is, but to have them capped at 2014 levels, with any growth in revenue beyond the capped sales tax to be split evenly between METRO and the member jurisdictions from October 2014 to October 2025. The compromise – adopted by the METRO board in mid-August would require METRO to spend part of its sales tax revenue to enhance ridership and improve service.

As our neighborhoods and communities develop and continue to expand, Harris County faces the significant challenge to upgrade, repair or extend many of our existing roadway systems. Continuation of METRO’s GMF provides a sustainable avenue to ensure that local taxpayer dollars are used to fund local transportation projects that move their buses, motorists and goods...as well as fire-fighting, ambulances and emergency equipment. Reduced congestion and improved mobility, building a strong roadway system, and connecting to the transit centers are all essential to achieving the overall transportation goals in our region. Leveraging the cost of capital improvement projects with monies allocated in the GMF allows county commissioners to continue to address the transportation needs along our system of major thoroughfares so crucial to economic vitality of Harris County.

**What happens if the referendum fails?** Simply stated, unincorporated Harris County would no longer receive these essential funds, putting much-needed capital improvements in jeopardy.

**What’s at stake for the Ponderosa Fire Department?** We rely on good surface roads and sound infrastructure – including water – to keep our fire and emergency response time to the minimum our residents expect and deserve. If these essential funds are siphoned off, to be solely dedicated to mass transit improvements (*which do nothing to improve or sustain the critical transportation corridors*), our services will ultimately decline.

There’s a lot riding on the outcome of this referendum. We encourage you to research and consider this important issue, and to cast your vote to approve the referendum.
ambulance with one.

When highly trained paramedics utilize LUCAS and ResQPOD™ en route to the hospital, CCEMS has found that more heart attack patients survive. In fact, CCEMS saw the ROSC (rate of spontaneous circulation) improve from 18 percent in 2005 to 53 percent in 2008.

Patients experiencing the most serious type of heart attack -- ST Segment Elevation Myocardial Infarction or STEMI -- however, require more sophisticated intervention to avoid irreversible heart tissue damage. STEMI involves coronary artery blockage that stops blood circulation to heart muscle. Unless circulation is restored immediately, the tissue quickly dies.

Cypress Creek EMS has pioneered protocols with its local area hospitals to “diagnose” the STEMI and initiate the life-saving interventional care prior to arrival at the receiving hospital. This process reduced the amount of tie that it takes for the STEMI patient to receive Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI), otherwise known as “balloon angioplasty”. The reduction of “door to balloon” time not only saves valuable minutes when heart muscle is dying, but has created a collaborative “best practice” model for the region and nation for heart attack victims.

Recognizing the potential to improve survival rates, CCEMS medical director and emergency room physician, Dr. Levon Vartanian developed a pioneering protocol for moving the diagnosis of STEMI patients into the field. CCEMS paramedics are trained to obtain and read a 12-lead EKG, and if a STEMI is diagnosed, the hospital’s catheterization lab is alerted. The patient bypasses the emergency room and is transferred directly to the catheterization lab. Under this protocol, coronary artery blockages are cleared in an average of 52 minutes as opposed to the American Heart Association’s national standard of 90 minutes.

Not every 911 call is for a heart attack, but according to Executive Director, Bradley England, the number of calls requiring high level responses within the boundaries of Emergency Services District 11 is increasing. During the first six months of 2012, CCEMS responded to over 7000 calls for life threatening medical emergencies that required either basic or advanced life support.

**Emergency Wrapped in Disaster…**

State of the art medical facilities are of little comfort if emergency services are hobbled during major disasters. Several active hurricane seasons have driven home this point for EMS providers. Not only do people continue to experience the usual emergency events during disasters, but power line damage, winds, and flooding potentially increase the number of medical incidents. Effective emergency medical response is even more critical for large-scale disasters, and adverse conditions require extensive pre-planning to maintain communications and dispatch abilities and to ensure that personnel and equipment are in place and protected.

CCEMS has taken positive steps to insure that emergency response services will be maintained, no matter what disasters befall the local area. In 2008, Hurricane Ike put CCEMS to a major test of its disaster response ability.

Well in advance of Ike’s landfall on September 8, CCEMS administration and medical supervisors met with other agencies to insure that emergency services would be able to meet local community needs before, during, and after the storm. CCEMS coordinated its emergency plan with the Harris County Emergency Operations Center, the Harris County Fire Marshal’s Office, the Texas Department of State Health Services, area hospitals, and local fire departments and utility companies.

CCEMS physically prepared to sustain emergency services through the storm by opening its own Emergency Operations Center, Bradley England, the number of calls requiring high level responses within the boundaries of Emergency Services District 11 is increasing. During the first six months of 2012, CCEMS responded to over 7000 calls for life threatening medical emergencies that required either basic or advanced life support.

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Center (EOC) and stocking the facility with food, water, cots, and medical supplies for staff and volunteers. The EOC and Comm Center are housed inside a conventional-looking structure that is actually a building-within-a-building designed to withstand hurricane-force winds.

Advance planning paid off when Hurricane Ike plowed through our area. CCEMS only suspended ambulance service for 37 minutes during the height of the storm. Call volume to CCEMS soared during the three-day period following landfall, increasing from an average rate of 134 dispatch calls per day until it reached a maximum of 600 calls per day on September 13. CCEMS was able to alleviate stress on local emergency rooms by coordinating patient traffic, making sure that patients arrived at hospitals with available space. CCEMS personnel successfully handled high dispatch call volumes for 10 days after landfall without compromising medical care standards through commitment to public health and safety, tactical planning, and collaboration.

Unconventional Medics
The Special Operations Division of CCEMS provides pre-hospital emergency medicine in deadly or unconventional situations. Two teams under Special Operations, the Advanced Tactical Team and the Bike Medic Response Team, work with law enforcement, the fire departments, and Hazmat. Wren Nealy, head of Special Operations, sums up the division’s mission simply, “We provide good medicine in bad places.”

Cypress Creek Advanced Tactical Team
Traditionally, EMS personnel respond to the injuries of law enforcement officers, suspects, or civilians after an area is secured by law enforcement, but waiting until the site of a medical emergency is safe can cost lives. A clear need for EMS personnel to be integrated into the law enforcement team for raids, hostage situations, and terrorist incidents was established by events such as the Columbine shootings and the 9/11 attacks. CCEMS responds to this challenge by maintaining the Cypress Creek Advanced Tactical Team (CCATT) of medics who are also commissioned peace officers.

CCATT medics work the normal EMS calls received daily at CCEMS, but they also train and prepare to support Special Operations needs as they arise. They are cross-trained and equipped with specialized skills to work alongside law enforcement personnel, providing care even while under fire or in remote locations. CCATT’s intense training program is nationally accredited and prepares tactical medics for unique situations that would rarely be encountered in a routine EMS day. Just a few of the specialized skills required of tactical medics include preserving evidence, treating blast injuries, responding to active shooters, caring for law enforcement animals, and navigation.

In order to share resources and because many hazards naturally reach across jurisdictions, CCATT partners with outside agencies. Currently, the tactical medical team works with the Harris County Precinct 4 Constable’s Office, the Houston Police Department, the FBI, the Houston Metro Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, and the sheriff’s office in neighboring Waller Country.

Bicycle Medic Response Team
Bicycle medics provide EMS in settings that are inaccessible to vehicles or by foot. The team members are prepared to ride in traffic or crowds, to perform emergency maneuvers, and to carry a load, in addition to providing pre-hospital emergency treatment. Like the CCATT medics, CCEMS bike medics work with law enforcement to provide EMS in hostile settings that are not secure enough for regular EMS. Medics on bikes can also work search and rescue, and during natural disasters.

The Bicycle Medic Response Team (BMRT) provides its
services to over 30 special events each year, including festivals, the PGA Tour Championship, and the Susan B. Komen Race for the Cure. The Bike Team also serves the community by participating in bike rodeos for local schools, where members perform bicycle inspections and give instruction on proper helmet fit, riding techniques, and traffic safety for riders of all ages.

CCEMS is now facing the next great challenge: dramatic expansion is occurring in the northern portions of the district that are currently less densely populated than others within the service area. By 2014-15, ExxonMobil projects that it will complete its new office complex near Interstate 45 and the Hardy Toll Road. The company estimates that 5,000 employees will transfer to the 635-acre site from other ExxonMobil offices in Texas, Ohio, and Virginia.

Additional EMS will be required to accommodate the anticipated population growth. According to CCEMS Executive Director, Brad England, relocating existing ambulances and spreading services more thinly will not accommodate the expected level of growth without compromising response time and quality of care.

A single ambulance is required to serve approximately 50 to 60 thousand people. With the potential of tens of thousands of new families and the associated businesses that will spring up in the area, additional ambulances, facilities, and personnel will be required.

“...meeting future challenges...”

There’s no doubt about it – saving lives is expensive. When CCEMS formed in the 1970s, straightforward ambulance transportation and basic EMS was the standard level of care, and it was paid for through donations and innumerable volunteer hours. As the standard of care became more sophisticated and the area’s population continued to expand, CCEMS funding shifted to voluntary contributions by water district customers, and was later supplemented by reimbursement from insurance and patients.

A 2005 election created Harris County Emergency Services District 11 to provide a reliable and equitable method to support emergency medical services. This tax-based funding provides the service area with some of the quickest response times in the nation and superior pre-hospital medical service through Cypress Creek EMS.

CCEMS works to conserve taxpayer money and use it efficiently. For instance, an ambulance costs about $140,000 but the most sophisticated and expensive portion rides like a turtle’s shell on the top of the chassis. When the chassis shows excessive wear, CCEMS pulls it out to be refurbished, and then remounts the medical equipment on a new chassis. This can be done twice over an ambulance’s life, greatly reducing vehicle replacement costs.

The collaboration between CCEMS and agencies such as the Ponderosa Fire Department also saves money and improves response time through shared dispatching and through the first responder network utilizing seamless communications.

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“The community can count on us to meet these challenges as we have the others we have encountered along the way,” England emphasized. “We have the commitment, the professional staff, and the expertise to meet future challenges head on, and to continue providing the quality emergency services our neighbors expect.”

For more information about CCEMS, visit their website: www.ccems.com.
Morris Bradley –
ESD 28 Board Member, Assistant Treasurer

The quality of life in area neighborhoods depends greatly on the generous volunteer spirit of residents who support the boards and associations that provide water, fire protection, and emergency services. In 2011, Morris Bradley of North Forest was asked to lend his business expertise to the ESD 28 board. “I like to help out in the community where I can, and I was asked about participating when an opening occurred,” says Bradley. Appointed to the open seat, Bradley says he found work on the board rewarding; he ran and was elected to the Board in 2012 and now serves as assistant treasurer for ESD #28.

Bradley’s extensive business management experience and financial knowledge make him well-suited for the position. He and his wife, Annette, moved to the area in 1991 from Arkansas, when a business associate recruited him to Houston to work with a drilling products manufacturer. Before retiring, however, his professional career spanned over 40 years with firms that produced a variety of products, including copper telephone cable, lighting and plumbing products, and pipe products for the oil industry. Like many Houstonians, his business experience also touched the space industry, including work with Boeing’s Industrial Engineering section while the company was developing the first stage of NASA’s Saturn V rocket.

Although acknowledging the value of the background that he brings to the board, Bradley is modest when assessing his role in ESD 28. “We have professionals that are trained to provide the fire and emergency services,” he asserts. “The Board is primarily responsible for looking forward in order to make sure that the district is able to provide the services that are needed. We keep taxes down as much as possible, while making sure that there will be adequate income for the district.”

Married for 49 years, the Bradleys have two daughters and three grandchildren. When questioned, Bradley laughingly confirms that, like other grandparents, he and his wife enjoy the two generations of offspring that are both “lovely and talented.”

His willingness to support the community extends beyond his work with ESD 28, Mr. Bradley also volunteers with Northwest Assistance Ministries and serves on the North Forest Community Improvement Association as board president. During tax season he also works with AARP in its income tax preparation program.

Blowin’ Smoke...Easy Does It!

The large volume fan -- Easy 3000 -- is a joint venture through a consortium of the Ponderosa FD and 11 other fire departments in north/west Harris County. This fan will replace a homemade version that has been in service for about 12 years.

The fan is used for smoke removal in large buildings such as churches, warehouses, big box stores and other large structures and will serve for many years. Other fire departments are; Atascocita, Champions, Cypress Creek, CyFair, Eastex, Klein, Little York, Northeast, South Montgomery County, Spring, Tomball, and The Woodlands.

The Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Association, Inc. will be the operator utilizing a 50% ownership and the consortium members paid their individual shares for the remaining 50%. This fan will be used by the consortium members at no charge. This joint purchase is another example of local control providing additional services at minimal cost. The entire cost of the project is $70,000.
Firefighting may not be in the DNA, but it may get in your blood. Brothers Mark and Ed Calub’s association with Ponderosa Fire Department follows a striking pattern in the firefighting community of multiple family members serving as firefighters, sometimes even in the same organizations.

Originally from Brooklyn, New York, they moved to Texas with their family and attended school in Klein ISD. Though separated in age by several years, Mark and Ed were volunteering at Ponderosa before graduation. The two men followed different paths into firefighting, but both seem to thrive on the challenge represented by each ambulance or fire dispatch.

Older brother Ed got involved as a high school junior when a friend joined Ponderosa FD. “He told me he was a volunteer firefighter, and I said ‘How is that?’” During his last two years of high school, Ed says he hung out at the station, did his homework, and completed the rookie class. “It was fun – awesome. I set my mind that I wanted to be fireman after high school.”

Mark Calub’s route into firefighting followed a more indirect path. After completing the health sciences program and EMT training in high school, he started at Sam Houston State University, intending to pursue nursing school. “A bunch of people I knew were getting hired and I said, ‘Why not?’” Starting as a paramedic in Montgomery County and then progressing into firefighting, Mark says he still enjoys the work. “It’s partly the adrenaline rush. Every call is a little bit different and we never know exactly what we’re going to.”

Both Calub brothers excel in a demanding profession. In addition to 12 years as a paramedic, Mark has nine years experience with the Houston Fire Department and seven years with Ponderosa where he is a Lieutenant. Before becoming certified in firefighting, Ed Calub learned the ropes as a volunteer paramedic with Cypress Creek EMS. A sense of adventure inspired him to pursue additional training. As he points out, each level of EMT training involves a specific skill set. “I was working at Cypress Creek and I’m thinking ‘Oh, I want to learn to start IVs.’” Intermediate training, followed by firefighter certification, led to his current position as a fulltime paramedic and firefighter with The Village Fire Department and as a volunteer at Ponderosa.

In his years at Ponderosa, Ed Calub developed another skill set, that of radio/communication specialist. When asked what the job entails, Mark replies jokingly, “I save Fred (Windisch) a lot of time and Ponderosa a lot of money.” Not surprisingly, effective firefighting requires dependable communication, and Ed keeps the equipment up-to-date, working, and FCC compliant.

Mark and Ed Calub both enjoy salt water fishing. Mark’s interests lean toward cars and the Texans, and Ed hunts whenever there is an opportunity to follow the deer or hogs with friends. Ed’s five-year-old son, Noah, already loves the fire station. No surprise there. After all, in his father’s words – “It’s awesome.”

Meet Mark and Ed Calub…
Autumn’s approach is the cue to tackle some home safety projects before winter — replacing smoke alarm batteries, properly storing flammable chemicals from summer projects, and checking fireplaces and heaters. We work hard to keep our families safe, yet one of the common risks for residential fires often goes unnoticed in the laundry area.

Drying clothes is second only to cooking as a cause of residential fires. According to a 2012 study by the U.S. Fire Administration, approximately 2900 residential fires started due to clothes dryers each year from 2008 to 2010 with an average cost of $9,610 per fire. Nearly a third of those fires resulted in injury.

Occasionally, clothes dryers catch on fire due to thermostat or wiring malfunctions. But many laundry room fires can be prevented by simple home maintenance and awareness.

Month after month, innumerable loads of wet clothes cycle safely through family clothes dryers. However, as water evaporates from each load, minute cloth fibers, pollen, and pet hair leave the fabric and are trapped inside the dryer. Most of this lint ends up in a screened filter located either inside the dryer door or in a pull-out trap.

Fire danger occurs when lint fills the trap and then migrates into other parts of the appliance. Accumulated lint blocks air flow and prevents hot air from escaping through the exterior vent. Heat buildup can then quickly ignite highly combustible fibers. In fact, removing lint might have prevented 34 percent of all dryer fires (USFA – FEMA, 2012).

A few do-it-yourself strategies will eliminate lint buildup and avoid what can be a serious, but preventable, fire. Check three critical areas of the dryer: the lint trap, the body of the dryer, and the duct connecting the dryer to the house’s exterior vent. Normally, no special tools are required, but a little extra muscle to move the dryer and an extra set of hands may be helpful. Unplug the dryer and if you have a natural gas or LPG dryer, turn off the valve and remove the supply line before beginning your inspection.

First, remove and clean the screened lint trap. A full trap allows lint to bypass the filter and accumulate unseen in other parts of the appliance. Many a parent can recall wondering “why isn’t the dryer working?” and then finding thick lint mats after their teenager used the dryer. As young children begin helping with household chores, make cleaning the lint trap a fun routine. Instill the same habit in adult members of the household; put a small trash can in the laundry room for the lint harvest and agree to a rule that “no one leaves the lint.”

If lint has been allowed to build up in the trap or the appliance is very old, a surprising amount of fibrous material can accumulate inside the appliance near electrical connections and heat. Some models have a removable bottom kick plate. (Did you remember to pull the plug?) Remove the panel and thoroughly vacuum the interior of the machine, or if you can’t access the inside, get assistance from a qualified service person.

The most serious dryer fires can start in the duct connecting the dryer’s outlet to the wall vent. These ducts are often neglected because they are hard to access without pulling the machine away from the wall and because accumulations cannot be seen without removing the duct. As hot, moist air leaves the dryer and enters the vent, the air cools slightly, allowing condensation. The moist walls then capture lint, and over time, the accumulation can block the vent. Fires may start inside the vent, but high temperatures due to reduced air flow may ignite lint and clothing inside the drum.

There are some side benefits to a clean machine. Specifically, more air flow decreases the time required to dry a load and increases energy efficiency. In the category of worst energy hogs, the residential clothes dryer leads the pack. Short of replacing an older machine with a new, energy efficient model, cleaning the lint trap can stretch the household energy budget. You know those new miracle dryers? A quick check shows that they also have lint traps to clean. Above all, we can reduce the risk of fire by continually cleaning that lint trap.
Grant Funds Are Working For You

In mid-2008 the Ponderosa FD applied for federal grant to assist in hiring full time firefighters. This SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response) was established by Congress in 2004 to address increasing the number of emergency responders to meet national standards and improving service levels. Ponderosa was fortunate to qualify for the competitive grant in 2009 and we immediately hired three new people. This brought our total 24/7 career firefighters to three per shift, allowing us to supplement our volunteer night staffing and daytime part time positions.

The five-year grant allows us to follow a specific budget schedule. The first year is 90% reimbursement, the second year is 80%, third is 50% (where we are now), the fourth will be 30% and the fifth is zero. The total amount of the grant is $301,000 and we will be able to sustain the three positions.

During the past five years, our total number of full time firefighters has grown to ten. We were able to fund a full time position — working 9 hours per day Tuesday through Saturday — in 2011. In 2013, we propose to “combine” one part time and the full time day position to hire two firefighters...giving us four full time firefighters, 24/7.

Our volunteer staff is robust at Station 62 on Louetta, but Stations 61 and 63 are in need of volunteers. The need to balance and/or juggle available personnel is somewhat hampered by available revenue that continues to fall due to lower property assessed evaluations. Over the years we have learned to adapt to fluctuating revenue, and to utilize our available funding to provide the best service to you.

SPARKY SAYS....

NEVER PLAY WITH MATCHES!
FIRE doesn’t just threaten homes and lives...

Its impact also reaches into communities economically. The National Fire Protection Association estimates that fires cost the U.S. about $331 billion in 2009. The following figures illustrate why robust fire protection is so important to communities.

$130 billion...Value of time donated by volunteer firefighters
$43 billion.....Career fire department expenditures
$41 billion.....New building construction costs for fire protection
$39 billion.....Cost attributed to civilian and firefighter deaths and injuries
$17 billion.....Net cost of fire insurance coverage
$16 billion.....Property damage due to fire

Source: The Total Cost of Fire in the United States, National Fire Protection Association, February 2012 (www.nfpa.org/research)

Statistically Speaking...

Our district is densely populated with about 3,700 citizens per square mile. This ratio places us in the “urban” category, and for those of you who travel regularly through the fire district, you can certainly see that this isn’t rural Harris County anymore! And, with sustained growth and development occurring out here, our public continues to rely on us more and more.

Based on January through July 2012 statistics, our total responses have increased 16 percent since last year. During 2011, we logged an 8 percent increase in total responses compared to 2010. Year-to-date 2012, we have assisted Cypress Creek EMS as first responders 41 percent more often than last year; and this follows a 22 percent response increase in 2011 over 2010. Cypress Creek EMS responses are increasing at the same rate.

Here is a “snapshot” that helps to explain what we do. There are, of course, many other categories that contribute to the total response statistic, including automatic and mutual aid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type per Month Average</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Fires</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Fires (2011 drought)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMS</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Responses</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Volunteers are needed! If you are hard-working, dedicated and interested in becoming part of the Ponderosa VFD, call 281-444-8465 today!

This publication is intended for the residents within the Ponderosa VFD service area. If you received it in error, we hope you’ll still read it and utilize the fire safety information.