

South Metro Fire Department Year End Report
Proudly Serving the Communities of South St. Paul and West St. Paul



Message From The Chief



What a rollercoaster of a year we had in 2021. Although Covid-19 still dominated the headlines it had less of an impact on our operations except for trying to keep up with the ever-changing guidance from the CDC, do we wear masks or don't we. Maintaining our vigilance and ensuring our personnel were protected from Covid-19 became increasingly difficult as we all began to suffer from Covid-19 fatigue. Despite the challenges we persevered. We were fortunate to get back to some normalcy throughout the year, and I hope the worst is behind us. It was great to get back out in the community's and reengage with our residents.

South Metro had many changes in 2021 including several personnel changes. Two personnel retired and we welcomed six new Firefighters into the South Metro family in 2021. Although we lost some tremen-

dous experience with the two retirements the six new hires are eager to learn and will contribute greatly to the success of our department. I want to thank the Fire Board for approving the addition of three new Firefighter positions during the 2022 budget process. I can't emphasize enough how much these new Firefighters will add to the department. It may not seem like a lot but one additional person per shift will have a significant impact.

South Metro continues to foster our mental health programs including PAR360 and a peer support team. Our efforts were recognized by the League of Minnesota Cities and the story featuring retired Firefighter Tom Brooks won an Upper Midwest Emmy. While we have made great strides in recognizing the need and implementing programs related to mental health, we still have plenty of work to do to ensure every South Metro Firefighter has the resources they need when confronted with a mental health issue.

Thank you to all members of South Metro for a successful 2021 and may we have a great 2022.

Mark Juelfs

Fire Chief

Personnel

The heart of our organization is our outstanding personnel. Without their outstanding contributions to South Metro we would not be able to function. I thank all of them for their dedicated service to the communities. In 2021, we had two personnel leave the department. Firefighter Rob Ehlert retired after over 24 years of service with South Metro and Captain Adam Schewe retired after over 17 years of service with South Metro. We thank Rob and Adam for their service with South Metro and wish them the best in their future endeavors.

Firefighters

John Voigt—1998
Shawn Kutney—1999
Peter Friend—2001
Paul Fletcher—2004
Tony Del Rio—2005
Jason Bessermin—2006
Tim Congdon—2007
Bill Brandecker—2007
Jake Ganfield—2008
Matt Dinneen—2009
Andy Dahlinger—2010
Tony Gutierrez—2012
Nate Rank—2014
Evan Larsen—2014
Dan Willems—2016
Logan Schewe—2017
Jordan Thompson—2017
Bobby Conley—2018
Billy Brandecker—2018

Firefighter—Continued

Steven Jensen—2019
Robby Smith—2019
Matt Kull—2019
Joe Zinniel—2019
Jake McCann—2019
Anthony Puckett—2021
Mark Domann—2021
Ramon Murillo—2021
Zach Weise—2021
Brandon Buckley—2021
Steve Grass—2021

Captains

Brad Quiggle—1993
Chris Snyder—1997
Ben Bailey—1999
Mike Nelson—2006
Sean Jansen—2007
Pat Noack—2008

Inspectors

Steve Wenzel—1998
Ange Appelholm—2013

Administrative

Deb Wheeler—2016

Chief Officers

Mark Juelfs—1998
Mark Erickson—1999
Terry Johnson—2009
Sam Seal—2014

Retired in 2021

Rob Ehlert—1997
Adam Schewe—2004

Six New Firefighters in 2021

South Metro welcomed six new Firefighters to our department in 2021. Five of the six filled vacancies we had throughout the year. The remaining Firefighter of the six hired is one of the additional three staff the Fire Board approved for 2022. We had the budget dollars to start one of the three in October. The other two Firefighter positions will be filled in 2022.



Anthony Puckett



Mark Domann



Ramon Murillo



Zach Weise



Brandon Buckley



Steve Grass

Mental Health

In 2021 South Metro continued to move forward with our mental health programming. We renewed our contract with BluePeak consulting to provide our members access to the PAR360 program. PAR360 is a mental health program created by Dr. Margaret Gavian. PAR360 provides the following;

- **Chief** - Chief consultation with a direct line to mental health experts.
- **Chief Calls** - Chief monthly training conference calls with Dr. Gavian to discuss current fire service issues.
- **Facebook** - Access to a confidential Facebook page to answer questions, get additional training and learn from others.
- **Family** – Training & resources for family members.
- **Provider List** - List of vetted providers with expertise in first responders.
- **Training** - 5 Training Sessions per year (initial roll out plus 4 special topics)
- **Training Modules** - Online resilience training modules for all department members.
- **Warning Signs** - Resources for how to recognize the warning signs in themselves and others.
- **Discount** - Discounted rate for additional services per request (e.g., Individual Resilience Pre-Plan meetings).
- **Individual Resilience pre-plans** - The pre-plan meetings provide an opportunity for our Firefighters to meet one on one with a mental health provider to review anything that is impacting their mental health.

In addition to the PAR360 program, South Metro is in the process of implementing a peer support team made up of Firefighters that have specialized training to deal with issues that their peers may be having. This support team is another resource for our Firefighters to reach out to if they are having any issues related to mental health. The team should complete its training in early 2022.

South Metro was winner of the League of Minnesota Cities 2021 City of Excellence Award in the 20,000+ population category for the our implementation of the Par 360 program to address mental health. The following pages are the article published in the League of Minnesota Cities publication.

South Metro Fire Department Makes Mental Health a Priority



BY DEBORAH LYNN BLUMBERG

In the summer of 2019, two firefighters with the South Metro Fire Department walked into Chief Mark Juelfs' office and told their boss they had been suicidal. One had even come up with a specific plan on how and where to end his own life.

They wanted resources to get help, and Juelfs did everything he could. One firefighter ended up at an inpatient center in Maryland, where he got treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The incident stayed with Juelfs. It bothered him that in his 25 years of training, never once had he been specifically taught how to help firefighters in distress.

"It got me thinking about what we do for our firefighters in the mental health realm," he says. One suicidal firefighter told Juelfs one reason he hesitated to come forward was that he was worried he'd be overlooked for promotion if he admitted he was struggling with his mental health. That concerned Juelfs. Something had to change.

Several months passed and work and life got busy. Then, in November 2019 a police officer the fire department worked closely with died by suicide. Firefighters were devastated, and Juelfs wanted a professional to speak to his team about the death.

He called Dr. Margaret Gavian, medical director for the Minnesota Fire Initiative. Gavian led a three-day workshop for the South Metro Fire Department, which serves the cities of both West St. Paul and South St. Paul, providing fire and emergency medical services to over 40,000 citizens and 11 square miles of coverage area. Gavian spoke about signs of suicide and where to turn to for help.



PHOTO BY ERIC HAUGEN

"During that time, I told her, we really need something in place that's preventative instead of always reacting when something happens," Juelfs says.

Gavian had developed a program that would do just that, and she and Juelfs worked together to bring the program to South Metro. West St. Paul and South St. Paul won a League of Minnesota Cities 2021 City of Excellence Award for making the mental health of firefighters a priority and implementing this program.

Suffering in silence

When Juelfs contacted Gavian, she was putting the finishing touches on the PAR360 Mental Health Initiative — a program to help firefighters manage their mental health issues and keep them and their families healthy and resilient. She developed it after years of working as a therapist with firefighters and recognizing the critical need for more support.

First responders attempt suicide at a rate six to 10 times higher than the general population, according to research,

while more firefighters die by suicide than in the line of duty. Half of firefighters think about killing themselves.

Meanwhile, firefighters have twice the rate of alcohol problems than the general population, four times the rate of PTSD, and eight times the rate of depression. Adding to the issue is that the majority of firefighters are unlikely to seek help — 92% think that seeking help for mental health issues is a problem.

"Firefighters are suffering in silence," Gavian says. "They don't like to talk about what's going on. We have a staggering problem and no comprehensive solution."

Taking a major toll are the high number of medical calls firefighters respond to. "They're in there cleaning up body parts after a car wreck," Gavian says. "These are gory, extremely stressful roles. Their job is to save people and often they can't. It's one of the most stressful jobs on the planet."

Historically, firefighters have not been trained to handle the emotional aspects

South Metro Fire Chief Mark Juelfs says the department's new mental health program is starting to remove the stigma of firefighters getting help.

of their job, the tragedies they're exposed to every day. "And they are paying the ultimate price," Gavian says. "They are dying as a result."

Retired South Metro firefighter Tom Brooks is one of the two firefighters who found themselves in Juelfs' office in 2019. Brooks' breaking point came after a 15-year-old who attempted suicide died in his ambulance on the way to the hospital.

Brooks struggled with nightmares and anxiety while at the department. He's been in treatment since and has improved. But he understands well the challenges firefighters continue to face.

"There have been generations of 'deal with it and go on to the next call,'" says Brooks, who was a firefighter for 20 years. "When stuff piles up over the years, some of us don't do so well with it. You think you're doing good, and then all



of a sudden, one day all hell breaks loose. Any program to help with mental health is huge."

Leaders give full support

Over the last 10 years, the South Metro Fire Department has seen its call volume rise by 28%. Last year it responded to 6,760 calls, 5,021 for emergency medical services.

After the police officer's suicide and with calls increasing, Juelfs committed to instituting the PAR360 Program at the department. He easily got the support of the South Metro Fire Board.

"Approving it was a no-brainer. It's the right thing to do," says Fire Board President Wendy Berry, a West St. Paul City Council member. "Our firefighters witness things that most people only hear stories about or see on TV. If we can find a way to help them normalize talking about how those things affect them, they're not going to feel alone. We can help them validate their feelings and understand other people feel the same way."

South St. Paul Mayor Jimmy Francis agrees. "I think the best decision that we made was saying yes to our chief, saying yes to the idea that he saw a need, and we could solve it by just saying yes," says Francis, who is also a Fire Board member. "And what I'm really excited about is that we have it in place and so now every new firefighter ... is going to experience this program."

A comprehensive program

The program kicked off in June 2020, and South Metro became the first fire department to implement it. The yearly subscription provides consultation,

(continued on page 32)

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WENDY BERRY
WEST ST. PAUL COUNCIL MEMBER
SOUTH METRO FIRE BOARD PRESIDENT



PHOTO COURTESY CITY OF WEST ST. PAUL

training, and emergency response for fire department leaders and firefighters and their families.

For chiefs, the PAR360 initiative includes an action plan on how to deal with mental health issues, monthly conference calls with Gavian, as well as specialized support for flagging “at-risk” team members before it’s too late.

Firefighters benefit from an anonymous, confidential eight-week online resilience training (with modules including handling stress and relationships), access to a confidential Facebook page to answer questions, a listing of vetted mental health providers familiar with the challenges facing first responders, and a yearly mental health check-in, also called a “resilience pre-plan meeting.”

“The resiliency meeting gives you the opportunity to talk to a professional and get feedback on what’s going on with your life, taking a more global look at your life, not just concentrating solely on the fire service,” Juelfs says. Family members also get to participate in periodic, all-day workshops on how to support healthy families and relationships.

Gavian said she felt compelled to create the program after getting frustrated with the lack of mental health resources for firefighters. “It struck me that someone has got to do something more to help firefighters, and in a larger, more systemic way,” she says. “Firefighters need culturally competent providers who understand their lifestyles and who are also trained in trauma.”

The PAR360 program costs \$170 per firefighter, with additional services chiefs can add on as needed. South Metro pays about \$12,000 per year for the program with the cost split equally between the two cities.

That’s compared to the financial costs of not having a mental health strategy in place, which can add up to thousands or even millions of dollars in lost productivity, treatment for substance abuse, and other expenses.

Removing stigma of getting help

This past July, a little over a year after the program started, Gavian updated the Fire Board on the program’s progress. Due to the program’s confidential nature, little concrete data is available,



PHOTO BY ERIC HAUGEN

but 100% of firefighters had an initial meeting with Gavian.

“The meetings were very productive,” Juelfs says. “People opened up and they relayed their issues. I think we’re doing a great job of starting to remove the stigma of getting help, though as a community we still have a long way to go.”

Fire Board President Berry says she thinks the mental health program has “shown our community how important mental health services are to our first

responders. I hope more fire departments see this and acknowledge the importance of taking just as much care of mental health as we do physical health.”

Brooks benefitted from the initiative for several

months before he retired, and he found the program’s training modules to be especially helpful. “The program was very good. For years, there’s just been too much of the ‘tough guy firefighter can take anything’ mentality,” he says.

The South Metro Fire Department’s program is normalizing speaking up, and it’s helping to get more firefighters the critical mental health services they need.

“What I’m really excited about is that we have [a mental health program] in place and so now every new firefighter ... is going to experience this program.”

JIMMY FRANCIS
SOUTH ST. PAUL MAYOR
SOUTH METRO FIRE BOARD MEMBER

“I’m very proud of our fire chief for initiating this and continuing to advocate for its importance,” Berry says. “It could have easily been swept under the rug or shrugged off as ‘just part of the job’ when he had firefighters approach him about the toll the job had been taking on their mental health. Instead, he acknowledged the problem and spent time looking for ways to help.”

Deborah Lynn Blumberg is a freelance writer.

Firefighter Deployment

For the majority of 2021 Firefighter Jake McCann was deployed to the Middle East with the Minnesota Army National Guard. We want to thank Jake for his service to our country and department. We anticipate welcoming Jake back to South Metro in May of 2022.



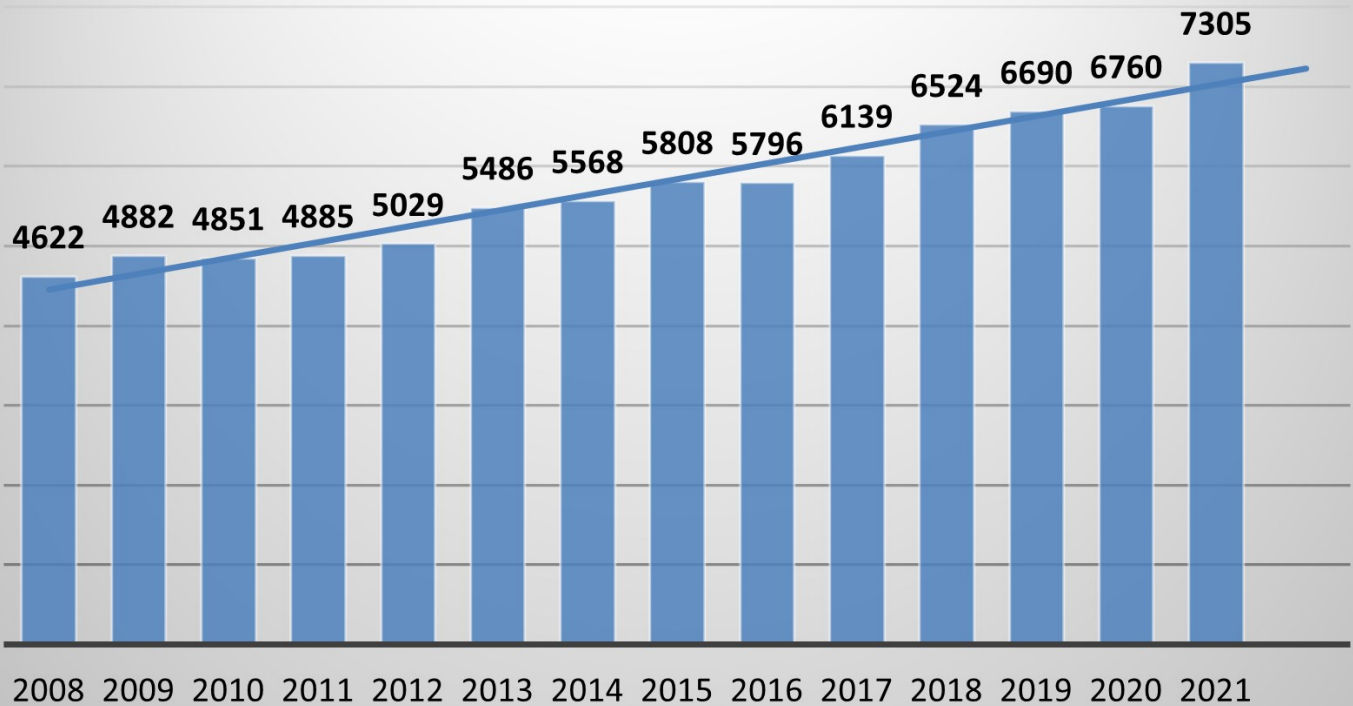
New Vehicles

South Metro took delivery of two new vehicles in 2021, including a Ford F-450 with a utility body and a Horton Ambulance. The Ford will replace the current Utility 2 and be used primarily as the tow vehicle for Boat 2. The utility body will allow us to store our water rescue equipment in compartments instead of the bed of a pick-up truck. This arrangement will allow us to use the bed of the new truck for hauling other items without having to remove the water rescue equipment. The Horton continues with our replacement schedule to purchase a new ambulance every three years. The new ambulance will be assigned as Ambulance 1 and the current Ambulance 1 will become Ambulance 3.



Incident Response

Total Calls

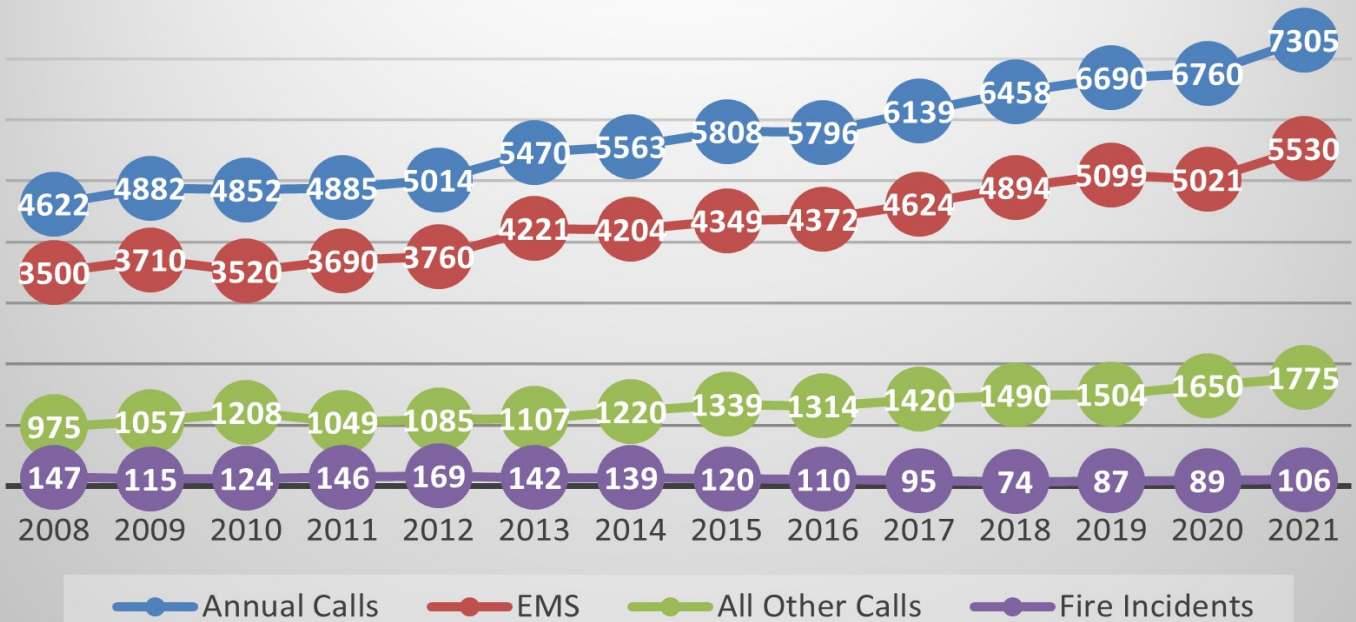


In 2021, our overall incident responses continued to rise. South Metro responded to 7,305 incidents in 2021. This was a 8% increase over the 2020 total of 6,760. In the last 10 years, 2012-2021, our call volume has risen 45%.



Incident Response

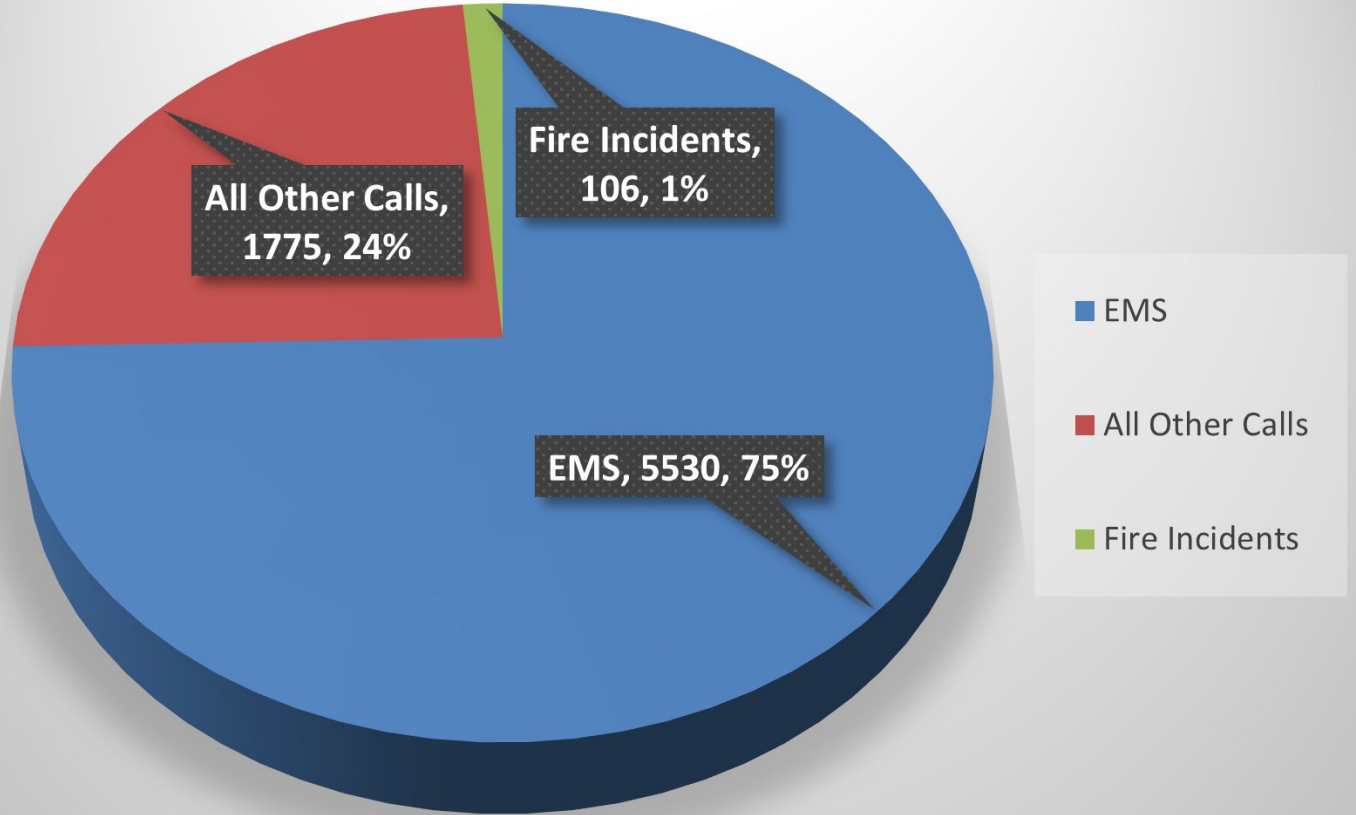
Calls by Type



The chart above illustrates the three broad categories of calls South Metro responds to including, EMS calls, Fire Incidents, and all other call types.



Incident Response

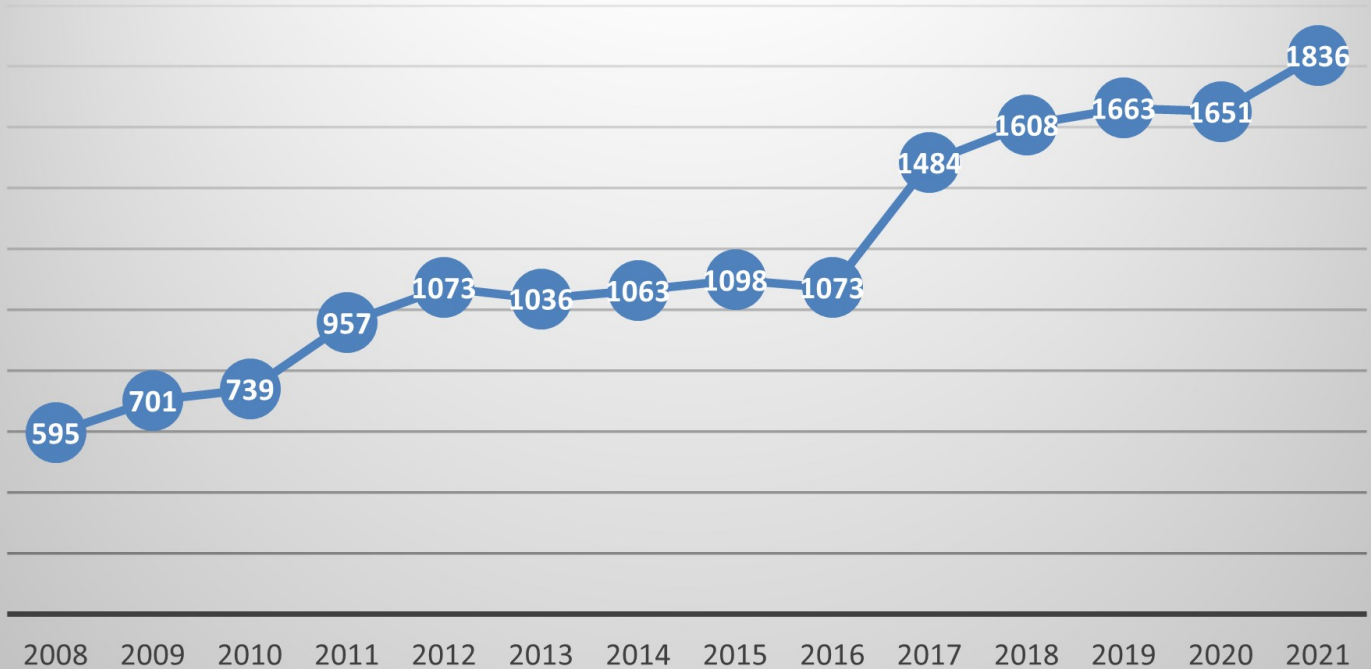


South Metro responds to three broad categories of incidents. EMS accounts for 75% of our calls, Fire related calls account for 1% of our calls, and all other call types account for the remaining 24% of our calls.

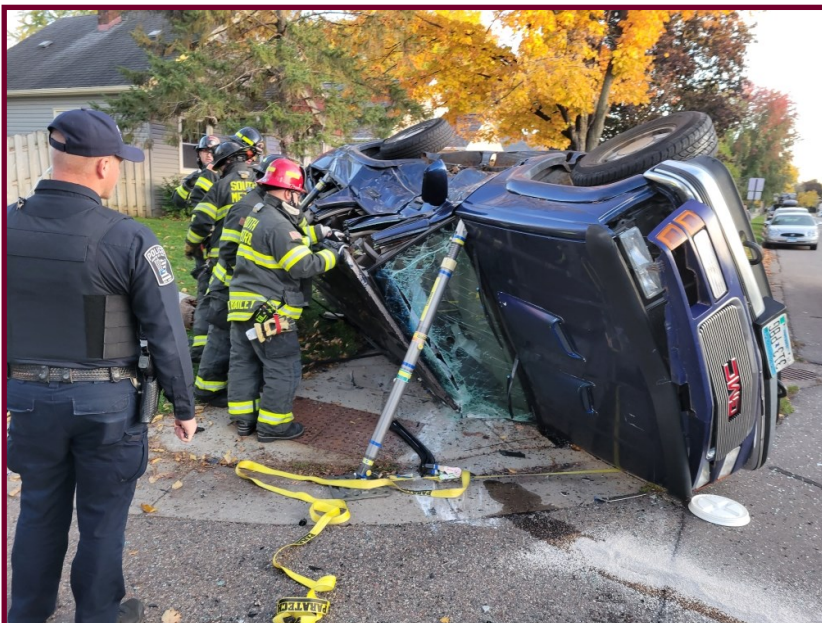


Incident Response

BLS Transports



We are in the fourth year of a 5 year contract with MHealth Fairview to provide basic life support transport in South St. Paul and West St. Paul. The chart above illustrates the number of BLS transports. In 2021, we transported 1836 patients to area hospitals. This was a 11.2% increase over the 1651 patients in 2020. In the last 10 years, 2012-2021 our transports have increased 41.5%



Incident Response - Pictures



Community Outreach

2021 was a much better year for community engagement. We were able to return to participating in activities with the public that were halted in 2020 due to Covid-19. In 2021 we conducted 87 public education events while connecting with over 2000 citizens. These events ranged from teaching Seniors in our community about fire risks and how to respond to a fire alarm to creating a slip-n-slide for the kids at Wednesday activities in the summer. We once again hosted our joint citizens academy with Inver Grove Heights. This academy is eight weeks long and gives our citizens a taste of what it is like to



be a Firefighter. We had a fire sprinkler demonstration trailer at the West St. Paul open house, had fire trucks in the Kaposia days parade, participated in safety camps, visited both South St. Paul's and West St. Paul's Halloween celebrations, shopped with local children for the Shop with a Hero event, and led the West St. Paul holiday parade. It was also great welcoming citizens back into the fire stations for tours.



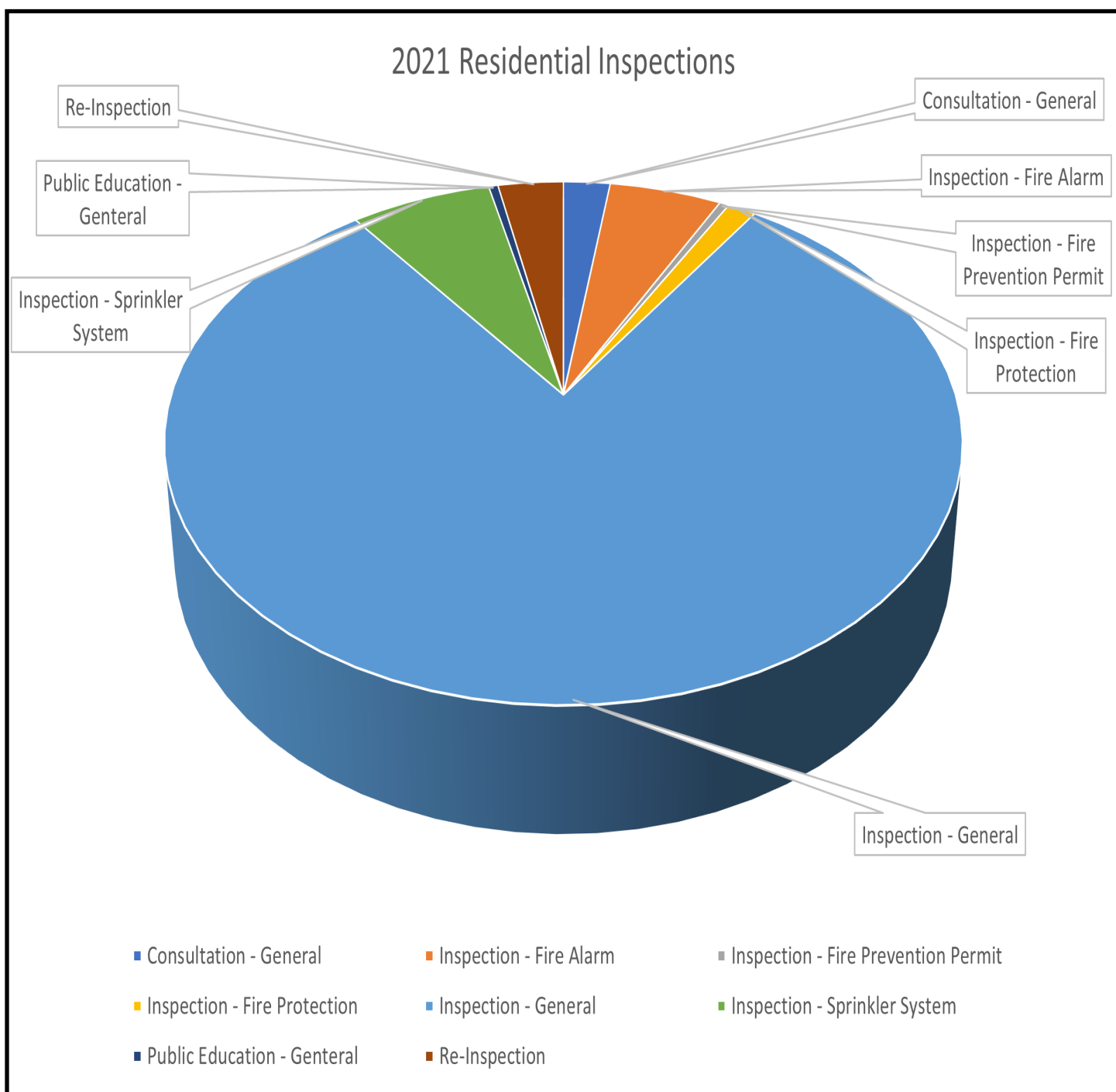
Community Outreach - Pictures



Prevention—Inspections

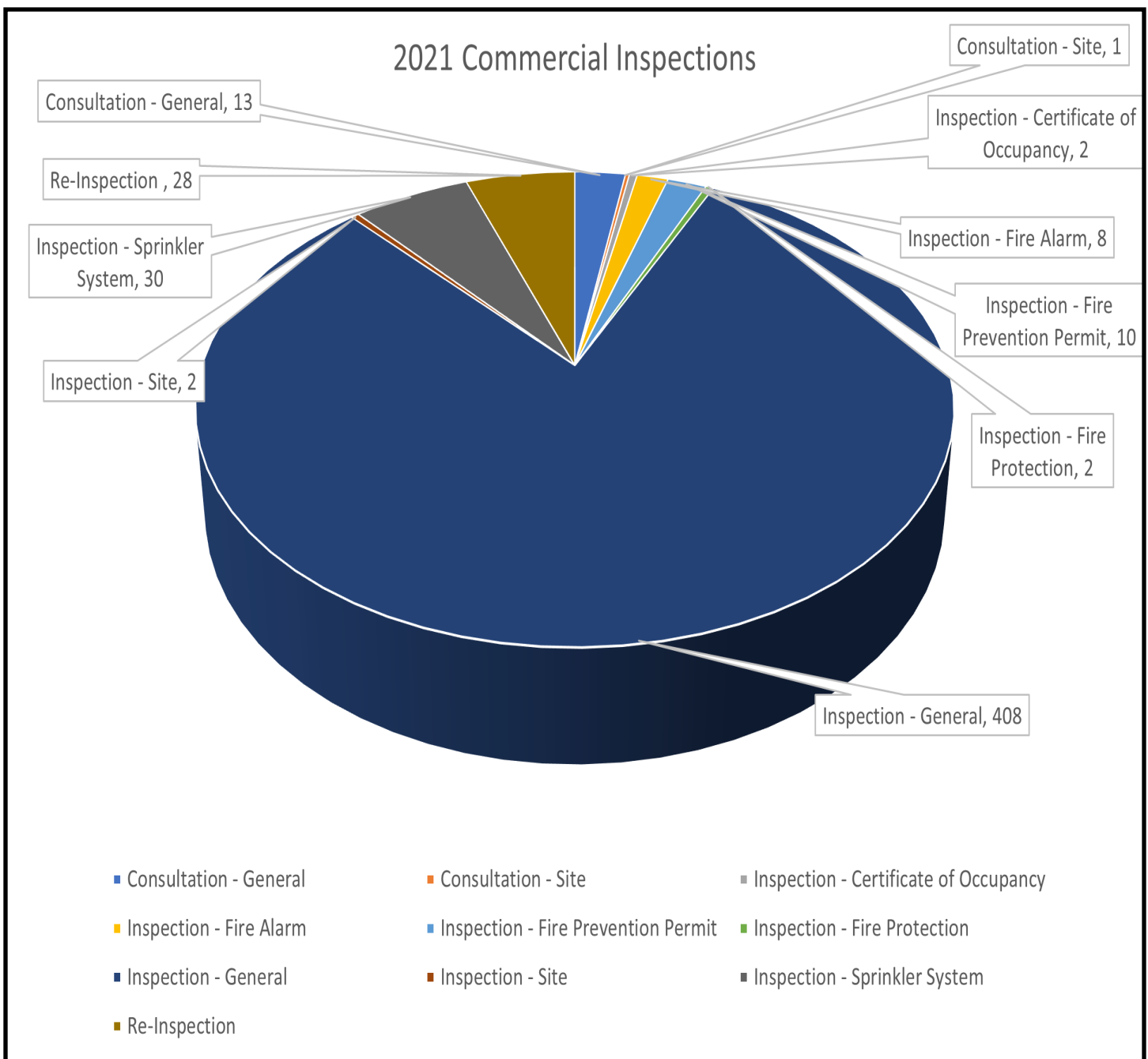
Below is a graph of our 2021 residential inspections. Most of our residential inspections take place in multi-family properties.

The prevention division performed a total of 221 residential inspections in 2021.



Prevention—Inspections

Below is a graph of our 2021 commercial inspections. The prevention division performed a total of 504 commercial inspections in 2021.



Training - Skills Day

2021 Training Numbers

Total Training Hours - 7246 Total Training Completions - 4050

In 2021, South Metro once again held a skills training day at the ABLE training facility in Burnsville. The focus in 2021 was on single family and multi-family fire attack. All personnel worked through several different scenarios and had to perform all the typical fireground tasks including forcible entry, stretching hose lines, search and rescue, victim extrication, ladder placement, fire extinguishment, and ventilation.



Training - Pump/Driver Training

2021 Training Numbers

Total Training Hours - 7246 Total Training Completions - 4050

In 2021 South Metro completed 680 hours of Driver/Pump training. This training is critical to ensure that our Engineers are ready to deliver our Firefighters water at the scene of a fire. The Engineer also completes critical fire ground tasks such as deploying hose lines and ladders, setting up ventilation fans, and being the eyes for the Captain when they are inside the building. The various topics covered included a driving course at the South St. Paul airport, standard pumping, relay pumping and apparatus placement.

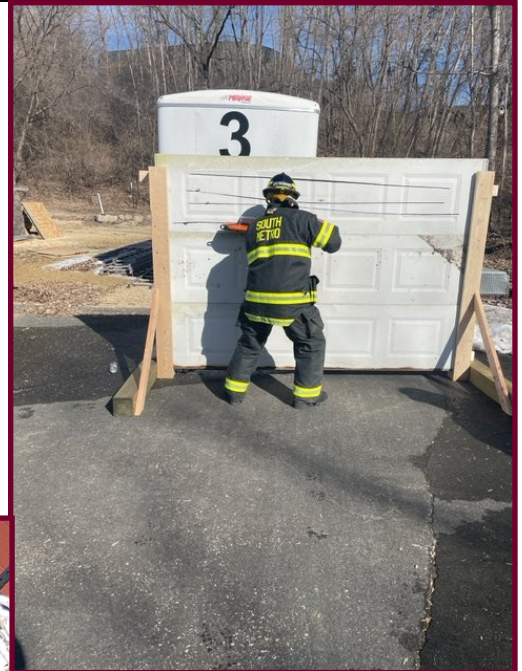


Training - Fire Academy

2021 Training Numbers

Total Training Hours - 7246 Total Training Completions - 4050

2021 brought six new faces to South Metro. To prepare our new hires to work as independent crew members we continued our partnership with the Burnsville and Eagan Fire Departments to put on two joint training academies during the year. During the joint academies our new hires hone their firefighting skills for four weeks. This part of the new hire academy is filled with intensive training and repetition to ensure the new hires are ready to operate efficiently and effectively on the fire ground.



Training - EMS

2021 Training Numbers

Total Training Hours - 7246 Total Training Completions - 4050

In 2021, South Metro Firefighters completed a total of 898 hours of EMS training. 75% of our incident responses are for EMS calls, therefore it is critical that we keep our training and education up to date. We continue to partner with MHealth Fairview for our EMS training.



Training

Various training pictures from 2021



Collaborative Efforts

The following pages is a list of collaborative efforts involving South Metro

Dakota County Special Operations Team – Since 2003

A cooperative effort of all Dakota County municipalities to provide hazardous materials and technical rescue response within Dakota County through a joint power's agreement. The team is overseen by the Dakota County Domestic Preparedness Committee. South Metro currently has three personnel assigned to the team.

Minnesota Task Force 1 – Since 2005

This group serves as the State's Urban Search and Rescue Team, much like the FEMA rescue team that get deployed to hurricanes and earthquakes. The primary function of the task force is to perform rescues in collapsed buildings. South Metro is part of this team through its participation in the Dakota County Special Operations Team. The other primary partners in the task force are the fire departments of Minneapolis, St. Paul, Edina, and Rochester – all being partners in a joint power's agreement. South Metro currently has three personnel assigned to the task force.

Henry Sibley – CPR

Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year CPR became a graduation requirement. School districts must provide one-time cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automatic external defibrillator (AED) instruction in a class of their choosing. South Metro provides this training to Henry Sibley twice a year at no cost to the school district.

Inver Hills Community College

South Metro has had a strong working relationship with the college for several years. The Fire Chief currently sits on the Colleges EMS advisory committee. In addition, students in the various EMS programs ride with our personnel to accomplish the patient contact requirements in their EMS program (First Responder or EMT).

Burnsville Fire – Water Rescue

Collaborative efforts between both organizations since 2013. Includes annual initial training for recruits and ongoing training for existing personnel, development, and review of SOG's, and operational support if requested during incidents. We have also provided the initial training and program implementation for St. Paul and Lakeville Fire Departments and a handful of individuals from other organizations. We frequently field calls from other organizations about our model and how it could be used within their organizations. In September we began orientation training for Eagan Fire Department.

Collaborative Efforts—Continued

Area Maritime Security Committee

This is a local sub-committee for the U.S. Coast Guard that focuses on security, equipment, and training needs along Pool 2 of the Mississippi River and Minnesota River up to Savage. This committee meets quarterly as a group and conducts yearly training designed to improve response to a variety of security, hazmat, and disasters along the river. The trainings have the committee to identify gaps in these areas and help to bring in federal port security monies for regional efforts. Our Boat 2 is an example of one of those grant funded purchases and is considered a regional asset. Boat 2 is frequently requested for response between the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers and the Hastings Dam.

Burnsville, Eagan, South Metro Recruit Academy

First proposed by SMFD in 2018, this collaborative effort will begin its third academy in October of 2020. This is a 4-week joint academy that focuses on basic firefighter skills taught as they are performed within our organizations. The skills are designed to maximize the efficiency of each firefighter as they work in smaller 2-person crews as is common for each organization. This academy can maximize time and cost for each organization by limiting the number of instructors, props, and training facility time for each organization. Recruits then spend an additional 1-3 weeks focusing on skills that are specific to their organization.

Burnsville, Eagan, South Metro Training Group

This is a committee made up the primary training providers for each organization that grew from the needs of the joint training academy. This group works on developing JPR's and training needs that work for all three organizations to reduce overlap of efforts between the organizations and allow for similar operations.

Dakota County Fire Training Group

This a county wide training group that shares training resources, props, and ideas. The group meets quarterly to discuss needs and upcoming training events. The group also focuses on ways to standardize training throughout the county and fill training gaps that individual organizations are unable to fill on their own.

Collaborative Efforts—Continued

American Red Cross

South Metro has partnered with the Red Cross in their Smoke Detector installation program. The Red Cross donates smoke alarms and South Metro install them in residents homes throughout the community. In addition to the installation, South Metro also performs a home safety inspection if allowed.

Dakota County – Fall Prevention Program

South Metro partners with Dakota County Public Health on presenting a fall prevention program to the older adult population in the community. (Currently on hold due to Covid-19).

Northern Dakota County Beyond the Yellow Ribbon

South Metro sits on the yellow ribbon steering committee. The Northern Dakota County Yellow Ribbon Campaign exists as part of the State-wide Yellow Ribbon Network to provide resources to members of the military and their families. We also provide resources to Veterans who previously served in the Military.

ROMA

Responsible Owner and Managers Association is a partnership with the City of West St. Paul and owners and managers of local rental properties. This group is intended to foster a stronger relationship between City departments and the owners and managers making the City of West St. Paul a healthier and safer place to live for the rental community. South Metro is a participant in the meetings and provides training on various topics throughout the year.

In Remembrance of Those Who Gave Their Life in the Line of Duty

Firefighter George Carleton
South St. Paul
May 22nd, 1892

Firefighter Jay Bloemers
South St. Paul
June 2nd, 1968

Chief William Sudeith
West St. Paul
November 30th, 1954

Firefighter Erling Armstrong
West St. Paul
January 11th, 1974

Captain John Heuer
West St. Paul
January 11th, 1974

Firefighter Richard Neikirk
West St. Paul
January 11th, 1974