

A Civilian's Guide to the Austin Fire Department



MISSION

The Austin Fire Department is committed to creating safer communities through *prevention, preparedness*, and effective *emergency response*.



GENERAL STATS

- Uniform (Sworn) Personnel: 1,197
- Civilians (Non-Sworn) Personnel: 118
- AFD responds to approximately 90,000 calls per year within the City of Austin and the surrounding Emergency Service Districts (ESDs)
- Active Fire Stations: 47
- Airport Station: 1
- Frontline Fire Apparatus:
 - 45 Engines
 - 3 Ladder Trucks
 - 10 Quints
 - 4 Rescues
 - 11 Brush Trucks
 - 4 Airport Fire Rescues
 - 7 Swiftwater Rescue Boats
 - 1 Fire Boat
 - Other assorted water craft (one Rigid Inflatable Boat {RIB}, six evacuation rafts, two Jet Skis)
- Seven geographic Battalions (geographic boundaries); One functional Battalion: Special Operations (Battalion 6)
- Ten City Council Districts

SECTIONS AND DIVISIONS

AFD is comprised of several major sections and divisions, including:

- **Operations:** Field personnel at fire stations.
- **Emergency Prevention:** Includes public education, hazmat and prevention engineers, fire inspectors, and a special events planning section.
- **Investigations:** Fire and Arson Investigators who are licensed peace officers.
- **Communications:** Radio/phone communications and dispatching.
- **Maintenance Shops:** Vehicle and air pack service.
- **Support Services:** Human resources, public information, research and planning, and financial/budget functions.
- **Education Services:** Cadet training, continuing education, and professional development.
- **Medical Operations:** Initial medical training and continuing medical education
- **Wellness:** Wellness/Fitness Center. Firefighter Physicals and On the Job Injury Coordination
- **Community Outreach:** Public education and community involvement.
- **Recruiting:** Recruiting of potential cadet candidates.
- **Special Operations:** Hazmat, technical rescues, water rescues, etc.
- **Risk Management:** Develops guidelines to prevent and reduce potentially unsafe actions/conditions on and off scene, fitness plan, and firefighter safety.
- **Wildfire:** Addresses the potential threat of wildfires through public education and fuel/vegetation management to prevent significant wildfire events within the city.

ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

The Austin Fire Department operates under a para-military structure. Ranks include (in descending order):

- **Fire Chief:** The Fire Chief is appointed by the City Manager and approved by the City Council. The Fire Chief does not have to be a member from within the department. The Fire Chief offices at AFD Headquarters at 4201 Ed Bluestein.
- **Assistant Chief:** There are five Assistant Chiefs that are appointed by the Fire Chief. They must hold the rank of Captain or above to be considered for the position. All of the Assistant Chiefs office at AFD Headquarters at 4201 Ed Bluestein.
- **Division Chief (or Shift Commander):** There are eight Division Chiefs appointed by the Fire Chief; three are designated as Shift Commanders and oversee a shift: A, B, and C. They are in charge of all the Operations personnel/stations in the city on that shift, which lasts 24 hours. The other five Division Chiefs are assigned to staff and supervise the larger sections and divisions of the department.
- **Battalion Chief:** The city is divided into eight battalions (or districts). There is a Battalion Chief (BC) in charge of each battalion per shift. The Battalion Chief is in charge of all the stations/personnel in that district on that shift. BCs change shifts at 10:30 a.m. each day. Battalion Chiefs are also assigned to staff positions, such as Risk Management, Education Services, and Prevention. Chiefs at all levels wear white uniform shirts.
- **Captain:** The Captain is in charge of the ladder truck or rescue unit. In a multi-company station (more than two apparatus), he/she is in charge of the station as well.
- **Lieutenant:** In the field, a Lieutenant is in charge of the engine. In a single-company station (a station with only one crew and one piece of apparatus), he/she is also in charge of the station. There are also Lieutenants and Captains assigned to staff positions (working 40 hours per week in an office).
- **Fire Specialist:** The Fire Specialist drives and operates apparatus to/from an incident.
- **Firefighter:** Firefighters in Operations work 24 hours on/48 hours off, and change shifts at noon every day. The shifts are referred to as A, B, and C shifts. The team assigned to a particular apparatus (engine, ladder, quint, or rescue unit) and the apparatus itself is known as a “company.”
- **Cadets:** New uniform employees are called Cadets while in the Training Academy; upon graduation, they become probationary firefighters for six months (during which they remain “at-will” employees). Upon satisfactory completion of their probation and passing probationary exams, they become firefighters (civil service employees).
- **Civilian:** There are civilian employees (municipal civil service) in the department in such areas as administration, engineering, public information, budget/finance, human resources, research and planning, and dispatch. Civilians have a different pension plan, pay scale, and benefits than the sworn personnel.

Promotions to all ranks up to Battalion Chief are decided by scores on written exams and assessment centers. At the rank of Division Chief and higher, promotions are referred to as “appointments” and are made by the Fire Chief. The Executive Team includes the Fire Chief, Assistant Chiefs, Division Chiefs, Assistant Director, the City attorney assigned to AFD, and the Public Information and Marketing Manager.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND RESOURCES: *Our Mission Goes Beyond our Name*

- Each station has an assigned “still alarm” territory (meaning the response area if only one unit is required, such as a medical call or alarm activation). They also are assigned a larger area known as their “box alarm” territory. A “box” is a geographic area, and follows roadways or other geographical boundaries like creeks or railroads; there are several boxes within each battalion. A “box alarm” is a structure fire; there are four engines, two ladders, a rescue unit, and two Battalion Chiefs assigned to all box alarms. A “light box” response—two engines, one ladder and one Battalion Chief—is designed for lower life-threatening fires. Examples include a fire in a closed oven, a smoking electrical outlet, or unattached shed, incidents that do not warrant the full complement of apparatus and personnel. AFD’s Light Box response is similar to most departments’ full structure fire response. If an incident warrants a larger response, such as an apartment fire, the Incident Commander can request and additional alarm. A second alarm doubles the number of units responding to the call and a third alarm triples the response. Additional alarms requested (4th, 5th, and 6th) each brings an additional four engines and accompanying personnel to the scene.
- In addition to fire suppression, AFD is the City’s first responder in medical emergencies—firefighters arrive first on the scene and begin patient assessment and stabilization, usually before the arrival of the ambulance. All firefighters are certified as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). Medical calls make up more than 70 percent of AFD’s call volume. Austin/Travis County EMS is a separate city department with paramedics that provide Advanced Life Saving services (ALS). Austin/Travis County EMS and AFD share a medical director. Due to the large number of fire stations strategically placed around the city, a fire truck oftentimes arrives first on a medical scene before an ambulance.
- AFD provides hazardous materials emergency mitigation response for both the City of Austin and Travis County. Trained Hazardous Materials Technicians are on duty 24/7 at the five Special Operations stations: Station 14 (central-east), Station 20 (south), Station 32 (central-west), Station 31 (west), and Station 28 (north). The Special Operations offices are located at Station 14.
- In addition to hazardous materials incidents, the firefighters of the Special Operations Division are trained in and respond to incidents involving water and swiftwater rescue, rope rescue, cave and confined space rescue, and wilderness rescue. These responsibilities are in addition to their response to normal fire and medical calls.
- As the city has grown, so has the threat of fires in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). All AFD firefighters have been trained as basic wildland firefighters (the first department in the state to do so). In 2013, the Wildfire Division was created to facilitate advanced level training, as well as coordinate fuel mitigation and community outreach to reduce the impact of wildfires. AFD operates brush tucks out of 12 stations on the periphery of the city to provide rapid and effective fire suppression in the WUI.
- The Aircraft Firefighting and Rescue (AFR) personnel are specially trained and certified, and have apparatus specifically designed to respond to aircraft emergencies. The companies must meet Federal Aviation Agency requirements and are funded through the airport, although they are members of the Austin Fire Department. The AFR Chief, who coordinates the training and certification for the teams, reports to the Assistant Chief of Operations, but is responsible to the Aviation Department at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA). The AFR units at ABIA respond solely to incidents on the airport grounds. Aircraft emergencies are divided into three categories according to severity. The AFD PIO will

provide initial information regarding our response but all other details must be secured from the ABIA PIO.

- **Alert 1:** An aircraft has reported some difficulties in flight but nothing too serious; only the AFR units respond.
 - **Alert 2:** The aircraft has reported problems in flight that could result in a crash landing; the AFR units respond, along with a box alarm component.
 - **Alert 3:** An aircraft has crashed, which could occur on or off the airport grounds.
- To alert a company to respond to an alarm, Dispatch “tones out” the station. The tones are followed by locution, our automated voice dispatching system. At multi-company stations, the firefighters listen to determine which company/ies are being dispatched.
 - Companies responding to emergency calls respond “Code 3” with lights and sirens; if there is no immediate danger or hazard, they respond “Code 1” (without lights or sirens).
 - Incident response is coordinated from the command post at the scene. The “Incident Commander” (IC) is in charge of the scene (the IC changes upon companies’ arrivals, going up the chain of command as the incident escalates). At most working first alarms, the IC is a Battalion Chief and the command post is the tailgate of the Chief’s vehicle (all Operations chiefs have specially equipped vehicles). A flashing green light erected above the vehicle signals the command post location. AFD operates under the Incident Command System (ICS), a leadership plan that details who does what on the scene.
 - An “exposure” is a property or structure that is in danger of becoming damaged by a fire in another structure or by an outside fire.
 - AFD provides “mutual aid” response and “automatic aid” response to areas outside the city limits when requested by the fire departments in that jurisdiction. Mutual Aid is when an outside agency requests help from another agency. Automatic Aid is when two agencies have agreed in advance to automatically respond into each other’s territory based on the closest unit. AFD has Auto Aid with all eleven surrounding fire agencies in Travis County; Mutual Aid is available statewide upon request.

RESOURCES

The following is a basic description of the primary fire apparatus:

- **Engine** (a.k.a. “pumper”): Basic firefighting apparatus that responds to all types of rescues, fires, and medical calls. Engines are staffed with a Lieutenant, a Fire Specialist, and two firefighters. The vehicle carries a supply of 500 to 1,000 gallons of water plus medical equipment, including Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs). This apparatus is the basic firefighting unit most often associated with carrying lots of hose and squirting water.
- **Ladder:** Larger than an engine and mounted with an aerial ladder, this vehicle carries the rescue tools and other rescue equipment, and has the primary missions of forcible entry, search and rescue, and overhaul, but also backs up engines on medical calls. Ladders are staffed with a Captain, a Fire Specialist, and two firefighters. The ladder apparatus, often referred to as the “hook and ladder,” carries no hose or water but is most often associated with being a “toolbox on wheels.”

- **Quint/Ladder:** An apparatus combining the features of both an engine and a ladder. It has an aerial ladder as well as water, hose, and a pump. It is slightly larger than a ladder and carries less water, hose, and tools in order to accomplish both functions with one apparatus. Quints are also staffed with a Captain, a Fire Specialist, and two firefighters.
- **Rescue:** Provides specialized rescue and hazardous materials mitigation equipment and lighting. Staffed with a Captain, a Fire Specialist, and two firefighters, Rescues respond to structure fires, hazardous materials incidents, and all specialized rescue incidents including vehicle rescues, swiftwater, rope, cave, and wilderness rescues.
- **Brush Trucks:** Four-wheel-drive vehicle that can carry up to 250 gallons of water into remote areas over rough terrain. These units are normally unstaffed.

ADDITIONAL FACILITIES

- **Headquarters:** 4201 Ed Bluestein
- **Wellness:** 517 S. Pleasant Valley Road
- **Prevention:** 505 Barton Springs Road, Suite 200
- **Arson Investigations:** 3002 Guadalupe
- **Special Operations:** 4305 Airport Blvd.
- **Operations Support:** 2011 E. 51st Street
- **Education Services/Training Academy:** 4800 Shaw Lane
 - All firefighter cadets go through a 28-week, 1,100-hour Training Academy. The course includes intense physical training, as well as a rigorous academic program. Medical training makes up more than 200 hours of the course work (more than 80 percent of the calls AFD makes are medical in nature and AFD is a medical first responder). To graduate, all cadets must pass state-administered exams, and be certified in the National Registry as EMTs and the Texas Commission on Fire Protection as firefighters.
- **Communications:** CTECC, 5010 Old Manor Road
 - AFD Communications is located within the Combined Transportation and Emergency Communications Center (CTECC). The Communications section is responsible for dispatching units to an incident both in Austin and throughout Travis County, as well as providing “call taking” for fire-related calls, monitoring unit coverage around the city, and are the first point of contact for the surrounding agencies when they request help from AFD. The majority of dispatchers are civil service members, although there is one civilian dispatcher. There are a minimum of six on duty at any one time; they work shifts of 24 hours on, 72 hours off.