

## VOLUNTEERING

# Volunteer Fire Departments Work to Reach Next Generation

NewsUSA

(NU) - Volunteers make up more than two-thirds of the nation's fire service and protect their communities from a wide range of emergencies. Yet many fire departments are having difficulty meeting the staffing needs that an all-hazards department requires.

Call volumes have skyrocketed in recent years, tripling over the last three decades. At the same time, many fire service veterans are reaching retirement age, while there are fewer new recruits coming into the ranks.

Department leaders are looking to recruit the next generation to fill the gap and step up to serve their community in a unique and rewarding way.

A survey conducted by the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), the national nonprofit association representing the volunteer fire and emergency services, found that 44 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 34 have an interest in volunteering as an emergency responder. A barrier to people taking action on this is awareness: the same survey found that 79 percent of people do not know if their department needs volunteers.

"Many people don't realize that their department is staffed by volunteers or that they need more volunteers," says NVFC chair Kevin D. Quinn. "We are working to get the word out that we need more people, and that anyone wanting to serve their community can be a fire service volunteer."

Millennials, as the 18-34 age group is commonly referred to, are one key demographic that volunteer fire and emergency service departments are trying to reach. With more than 80 million people, this demographic will play a crucial role in the success of the volunteer fire service.

"Millennials make great firefighters and emergency volunteers. They work hard, learn fast, are technologically savvy, and are used to balancing multiple responsibilities," says Quinn. "It is this generation that is really where the future of the fire service lies. They are our leaders of tomorrow."

The younger generation is also



finding that there are many benefits to being a fire service volunteer. For one, it provides a meaningful way to give back to the community. Volunteers also learn skills that they can use in many aspects of their personal and professional lives. In addition, many volunteers find the sense of community and family that exists in the fire service to be one of its biggest draws.

Volunteer firefighters are a diverse group of people who come from all backgrounds, professions, ages, genders, races, and ethnicities. Anyone with the desire to serve can find a volunteer role in the fire service. It is mainly about having the heart and drive to make a difference where it's needed most.

New recruits are trained by the department. Fire departments typically respond to a variety of emergency calls, which may include fires, medical emergencies, search and rescue, natural disasters, hazardous materials incidents, vehicle collisions, terrorist threats, and other public service calls. Many departments also provide community services such as fire prevention education.

The NVFC has created the Make Me A Firefighter campaign ([www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org](http://www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org)) to help departments with recruitment efforts, educate the public about the need for volunteers, and connect potential volunteers with their local fire department.

"We encourage anyone interested in volunteering to visit [www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org](http://www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org)," says Quinn.

To view the video, click here.