

Fire Chief

The following is the report of the Berlin Fire Department for the year ending December 31, 2009:

Fire Log – 2009

Building Fire: 7	Lightening Strikes: 1	Service Calls: 17	Other Incidents: 4
MV Fire: 2	Wires Down: 6	Good Intent: 28	Mutual Aid Rec'd: 0
Brush Fire: 10	Hazardous Incidents	Smoke Detectors: 52	Mutual Aid Given: 4
Other Fire: 0	Fuel Spills: 2	Other Alarm Calls: 13	Citizen Complaints: 2
Vehicle Crash: 49	LP/LNG Leaks: 5	Malicious Alarms: 1	Explosions: 2
Other Rescues: 2	CO Alarm: 7	Sprinkler Activation: 5	Burning Citation: 1
Heating Equip. Fires: 0	Other Hazards: 4		
			Total Runs: 224

Permits Issued- Burning: 244

Other Permits Issued: 324

Inspections Conducted: 248

The Berlin Fire Department is charged with protecting the lives and property of the citizens and visitors of the Town. We are responsible to be prepared for any/ and all types of emergencies that could be anticipated including fire, environmental & natural hazards or events, or terrorist events. To accomplish this mission the department must work to maintain a well-trained and equipped force ready and available to respond to any type of incident. The most effective way to protect the community is via an effective fire prevention program. Fire prevention serves to educate the public, enforce the Commonwealth's laws and fire regulations established to protect the public and conserve property, and to provide for the general safety of the public.

We are always looking for eager volunteers to join the department as firefighters. **We can also use volunteers who may have just the skill set to help the department in other areas.** PLEASE, give us a call anytime day or night (978-838-2444) if you even think you are interested. We would be happy to give you a tour and discuss opportunities in the department. New firefighter volunteers can be brought on board if the department has the funding available for pre-screening, training, and equipping the new personnel.

During 2009, with your support, the fire department has been able to accomplish the following:

- Send provisional firefighters to a Mass. Fire Academy Firefighter I/II training program at the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy. We have one person enrolled as of the end of 2009.
- Conducted training drills including review of basic firefighting, development of new skills, and conducted state or federal mandated training. Training was conducted under certified instructors, **all of whom donated their time and equipment.** Special thanks are extended to FF/EMT Joseph Nedder, FF/EMT-I Kenneth Franks, FF/EMT-P P.J. Phaneuf, & FF/EMT-B Thomas Hogan, Fire Lt./EMT-I James Peltier [the aforementioned all from other fire departments] and District 8 Fire Warden Patricia Correia for volunteering their time, expertise and equipment. Training is to save firefighters and civilians lives.
- *Live Wildland Fire Training* was conducted as part of the VFA [*Volunteer Fire Assistance*] grant. The department would like to especially thank Mr. Duncan Baum and Mr. Eric Baum for their personal the use of Duncan's agricultural land to conduct the training.
- Annual required hose testing and fire pump testing was completed by the firefighters. Required equipment testing programs help to identify failing equipment and repair or replace it to reduce an emergency failure situation and personal injury to fire personnel or the general public.
- FF Brain Ingram continues as the department's SAFE [*Student Awareness Fire Education*] and fire safety coordinator. Funding for the program is by state/federal or private grants. Personnel donate their time during the day. This means that they must take time off work to present the programs to the students at the schools and the fire station and to develop and present programs to the public.
- Several firefighters [Brendan Gilchrist, R. Thomas Steele, and Michael Wheeler] continue to work on completing their EMT-B training and certification, all on their own time and at their own expense. FF Natan Hagopian is working towards his EMP-P under the same constraints. Lt. Patricia Correia has

started Fire Officer II training, again on her own time and at her own expense. All of the above results in direct benefit to the citizens of Berlin.

- Our annual open house during *Fire Prevention Week* in October was held. Firefighters served as Information guides. A donation by **Pure Hockey** supplied the refreshments for visitors.
- Crucial repairs were completed on Ladder 1 in 2009. Ladder 1 [acquired with Solomon Pond Mall mitigation funds in 1997] consists of a **1997 Pierce Saber cab and chassis** and a **1985 Hahn body, aerial device, and compartments**. Most of the repair work had been identified during routine service was funded with \$20,000 under Article #53 at the 2009 Annual Town Meeting. This bodywork exposed inner structures that were not otherwise viewable. A completely rusted and failing water tank cradle was found which resulted additional disassembly and unanticipated additional repair costs of nearly \$4000.00 Routine service and inspection conducted while the apparatus was out of service. As a reminder, in 2008 there were in excess of \$9165 for routine service and repairs to the ladder. The aerial waterway and nozzle continues to drift in and out of service pending repairs or rebuilding in the future. The 1997 component [cab/chassis/pump] remains sound [**13 years old**]. The remaining 1985 appendage has been repaired, but is this reliability issue. The department still hopes to obtain 20 years of service from the unit as if it had arrived as a completely new apparatus in 1997. We want to thank the continued support and confidence of the Selectmen, FINCOM and the townspeople for the funding of the emergency repairs. Given the continuing accidents involving fire apparatus the importance of proper maintenance my qualified servicing personnel are vital for firefighters and the general public.
- We applied for a *Federal Assistance to Firefighters Grant*. As of the end of the calendar year the department had not receive an award notification. If awarded, there would need to be a 5% match by the Town to receive the funding. This is a competitive Federal grant program that is administered by FEMA.
- The department received a \$3958 State Firefighting Equipment Grant [exclusive for specified equipment].
- The department was awarded a \$2000 matching grant from the Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant from the Department of Conservation and Recreation/Bureau of Forest Fire Control and Forestry [exclusive for wildland and urban fire personnel training]. This is a 50/50 matching grant available only to volunteer fire departments.
- Grant funding by the fire department, now in excess of \$281,000 helps eliminate the financial burden on maintaining the fire department.

In 2010, the fire department continues to be challenged to maintain a volunteer department. Given the demand on the budget it becomes difficult to dedicate the monies to fund new recruits [mandatory special physical screening and testing, physical fitness testing, protective equipment, and initial firefighter training and certification. Given the severe economic environment, family pressures, personal time, professional demands, work locations outside the local community and less business/work opportunities locally all contribute to the pressures placed on people to dedicate the amount of time to serve as a volunteer firefighter. Unlike some volunteer opportunities, the fire service places **very** significant time and physical demands. Mandatory training is necessary for firefighter and public safety. The training is continual. During the next year we anticipate:

- Establishing a group to conduct a reassessment of the department's apparatus needs
- Keep the apparatus serviced and in good repair
- Conduct mandatory training and provide for added training opportunities
- Start a succession plan for the department's future leadership
- Continue SAFE Programs and provide for new fire prevention programs for the remainder of the community, especially those seen at higher risk from fire [the very young and very old]
- Re-establish maintenance of the town's waterholes and dry hydrants with volunteer labor and funds

The Board of Fire Engineers appoints department members. The following is a list of appointed members
As or year-end:

Officers: Chief Bruce Ricard, Asst. Chief George Pendergast, Captain David Lichwell,
Captain James Peltier, Capt. Paul Wheeler, Lt. Frank Brewer, Lt. Patricia Correia,
Lt. Frederick Cummings, Jr., Lt. Sean Pendergast, Safety Officer John (Jack) Peltier

Firefighters: Anthony Alessi, James Concannon, Jason Dumas (EMT-B), Brendan Gilchrist, Natan Hagopian (EMT-B), Ira Hoffman (EMT-B), Brian Ingram, Richard McGowan, Christina Mitchell, John

Mitchell, Jr. (EMT-B), Henry Pacific, PJ Phaneuf (EMT-P), Richard Plummer, Kevin Pond (EMT-B), Jeremiah Pratt, James Spinney (EMT-B), R. Thomas Steele, Ret. Chief Robert Tervo, Mark Valette, John Walsh (MD), Michael Wheeler, Ret. Chief Roger Wheeler, David White

Berlin has the **only** remaining call/volunteer departments in the area. As personal time, work commitments, financial circumstances, and family (the most important factor) impact our firefighters it remains extremely difficult to maintain a call/volunteer force. Providing daytime staff that can respond immediately is critically difficult. In addition, initial training requirements and their associated costs, continuing educational and training requirements with associated costs, and necessary maintenance of personal health and fitness all contribute to the burden on the volunteer firefighters. It is estimated that a current volunteer in Massachusetts is worth \$25.47 per hour in 2007 dollars [www.independentsector.org]. If you know someone who currently volunteers please take a moment to recognize their efforts and thank them for the time and service they offer. **There is no way to overstate the value of your volunteers.**

Special Recognition: FF Richard McGowan (U.S. Army Major) and FF John Mitchell, Jr. (Air Force Staff Sergeant). Both continue to find the time in service to the country as well as the local community.

Respectfully submitted,

Chief Bruce E. Ricard