

## Response to Questions on the FY 2013 Budget

**Request By:** Supervisor Cook

**Question:** What criteria are used to determine when a ladder truck is sent to respond to an emergency call? In an average year how many calls do the ladder trucks respond to, and of that how many do not ultimately require the equipment on the ladder truck in order to carry out the mission? Has the County studied policies from other localities to send smaller vehicles to certain emergency calls, with ladder trucks being held back and used only if needed? If so, what determinations have been made?

**Response:** Dispatch algorithms have been developed for specific incident types that assign the appropriate complement of apparatus based on their respective attributes and capabilities. Ladder trucks are dispatched on all reported fire incidents, gas leaks, rail emergencies, high angle or elevated rescues, hazardous materials incidents, elevator rescues, and investigations of hazardous conditions such as odors or unknown sources of smoke.

For medical emergencies, dispatch algorithms identify the closest first responder. Personnel assigned to the ladder truck are certified firefighter/EMTs and ladder trucks are equipped with AEDs and basic life support (BLS) equipment making ladder trucks the emergency medical services (EMS) first responder when it is the closest unit to a medical emergency.

Ladder trucks are equipped to perform a myriad of tasks commensurate with all hazards and fire ground tasks. Atmospheric monitoring devices, ventilation equipment, forcible entry and search and rescue tools, thermal imaging cameras, rope, ladders, 100 foot aerial devices, and salvage and overhaul equipment are just some of the examples of the capabilities of the unit.

On average, ladder trucks are dispatched to 19,867 calls annually, but are required to perform on-scene tasks for 6,643 calls. Discrepancy between the two figures can be explained by false alarms where the call is canceled once the vehicle is enroute, medical emergencies where another unit arrives first on-scene and places the truck in service, or a fire where only one truck is needed for the event. More specific counts for these calls are not available.

Smaller vehicles capable of performing ladder truck functions are referred to as “ladder tenders.” The Fire and Rescue Department continues to evaluate the ladder tender concept which has been adopted by departments particularly in the south and southwest where one story residential structures are predominant. While there is value in reducing the wear and tear on a large apparatus, the concept would involve the cost of adding vehicles into the fleet as well as the cost of maintenance and replacement. Additional research regarding long term gains realized by this approach and continued comparisons in demographics, occupancy types and incident activity is necessary to determine if this is a cost effective option for Fairfax County.