



Department of Public Safety

Division of Fire Safety

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March 24, 2020 **COVID-19 Information for Fire Departments**

Obtaining Current Information for the Fire Service

The Vermont Fire Academy distributes daily situation updates via e-mail. These messages contain a collection of pertinent information from the State Emergency Operations Center. Fire service personnel who wish to receive these messages can subscribe to the e-mail list by visiting <https://firesafety.vermont.gov/academy>.

Regularly updated information for the fire service is also posted online by the Division of Fire Safety at: <https://firesafety.vermont.gov/Firesafety/covid-19fdresources>

If you need assistance or information, call 1-800-615-3473 to reach the Vermont Fire Academy who will help route your call to the appropriate agency or person.

Personal Protective Equipment

As you are aware, there is currently a shortage and high demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks, face shields, and isolation gowns. Requests for PPE are being handled and coordinated by the Vermont Department of Health. Currently, the highest priority for issuing PPE is for healthcare workers. Resource requests will be prioritized based upon resource availability and provider need with the understanding that not all requests may be met. Departments can make a request for PPE online at: <https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/5504100/COVID-Resource-Request-Form>

Responders who will be in direct contact with or who will be in a compartment with a patient with possible COVID-19 infection should follow standard precautions and use the following PPE:

- Facemask
 - N95 respirators or respirators that offer a higher level of protection should be used instead of a facemask when in the presence of a confirmed COVID-19 case, or when performing or present for an aerosol-generating procedure.
- Eye protection (i.e., goggles or disposable face shield that fully covers the front and sides of the face). Personal eyeglasses and contact lenses are NOT considered adequate eye protection.
- A single pair of disposable patient examination gloves. Change gloves if they become torn or heavily contaminated.
- Isolation gown.
 - If there are shortages of gowns, they should be prioritized for aerosol-generating procedures, care activities where splashes and sprays are anticipated, and high-contact patient care activities that provide opportunities for transfer of pathogens to the hands and clothing of EMS clinicians (e.g., moving patient onto a stretcher).



Please note that CDC guidelines consider a facemask equivalent to an N-95 mask when assigning risk to a potential COVID-19 contact. Using a mask instead of an N-95 mask would not change isolation recommendations.

For more specific information regarding EMS interaction with COVID-19 visit:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-for-ems.html>.

Monitoring Fire Department Capabilities

It is possible that local fire departments could see a decrease in the availability of responders due to illness, quarantine, self-isolation, family responsibilities, or assignment to essential work. Each department should develop a system for responders to report their availability. The Vermont Fire Academy is monitoring the fire service capabilities within each County through a designated County representative and reporting this information to the State Emergency Operations Center. If your department is experiencing or anticipating a shortage of personnel or other resources due to COVID-19, this should be reported to the designated County representative listed below by the department's Chief Officer.

County	Designated Representative	Contact Information
Addison	Dean Gilmore	e-mail: deano@gmavt.net phone: 802-373-4198
Bennington	Chad Prentiss	e-mail: chadprentiss@yahoo.com phone: 802-375-5433
Caledonia	Patrick McLaughlin	e-mail: Patrick.McLaughlin@vermont.gov phone: 802-585-4468
Chittenden	Al Barber	e-mail: ABarber@hinesburg.org phone: 802-777-2240
Essex	Rick Hannux	e-mail: rhannux20@gmail.com phone: 802-723-6234
Franklin	Todd Cosgrove	e-mail: todd.cosgrove@vermont.gov phone: 802-585-0741
Grand Isle	Ron Kumetz	e-mail: rkumetz@falconcomms.com phone: 802-349-8469
Lamoille	Brad Carriere	e-mail: hpfsems1@yahoo.com phone: 802-730-6770
Orange	Chad Whitcomb	e-mail: chad@whitcombwelding.com phone: 802-356-2100
Orleans	John Harlamert	e-mail: john.harlamert@newportvermont.org phone: 802-673-9702
Rutland	Robert Schlachter	e-mail: schlacfire@aol.com phone: 802-342-0919
Washington	Gary Dillon	e-mail: waterburyfd@waterburyvt.com phone: 802-371-7515
Windham	Tom Goddard	e-mail: chief@putneyvt.org phone: 802-579-9526
Windsor	Ben Whalen	e-mail: ben.whalen@vermont.gov phone: 802-376-6939

It is recommended that mutual aid and automatic aid plans are established in advance of the need. This should be coordinated on a County or regional level.



Recommended Changes to Fire Department Operations

In order to protect the operational capability of Vermont's Fire Service during this unprecedented event, the following recommendations should be considered.

Close your fire station to the public. Limit access to emergency service facilities to emergency responders to decrease exposure to the virus. If the general public is likely to come to your station to seek services, direct them to a service area where they can be isolated from the interior of your facilities and contact with personnel can be controlled.

Discontinue non-emergency department activities. Do not allow your personnel to gather for any purpose other than emergency response and preparedness activities. This includes cancelling business meetings and training or seeking alternative means to meet such as conference calls and web-based meetings. If you have a staffed station, emphasize the importance of hygiene precautions, frequent disinfection, and appropriate social distancing.

Do not allow sick personnel to respond to emergencies. Prohibit personnel from reporting for duty or responding to emergencies if they have been in close contact with a person who has COVID-19 or if they have felt unwell with respiratory symptoms in the last few days. This includes cough, high temperature, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing.

Reduce the exposure risk in emergency response vehicles. Increase ventilation in emergency vehicles by operating the ventilation system in non-recirculating mode and consider bringing in as much outdoor air as possible by opening windows.

Decontaminate, clean, and disinfect. Keep touch surfaces and equipment disinfected. Your department should identify an appropriate disinfectant that is effective against COVID-19. Visit the EPA website for guidance on selecting an effective disinfectant: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>. Disinfect the interior touch surfaces of apparatus and equipment after each use. Use appropriate disinfectants on the surfaces within your facility frequently including bathroom fixtures, door handles, phones, keyboards, and other surfaces.

Self-contained breathing apparatus face pieces and regulators should be cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer's instructions. Most manufacturer's permit the use of a hypochlorite solution (50 ppm of chlorine) made by adding approximately 1 mL of laundry bleach (verify that the bleach contains 5% sodium hypochlorite) to 1 liter of water. Allow the disinfectant to have a minimum of 5 minutes of contact time before rinsing with tap water and drying.

On scene precautions.

- Pre-Entry (size-up):
 - Ask questions
 - Look for clues
- Entry:
 - Limit personnel
 - Look for clues
 - Limit time inside
- Post Entry:
 - Isolate
 - Decontaminate
 - Document

Keep your distance. Maintain a minimum of 6 feet from members of the public when responding to calls whenever possible and assess the situation from a distance. Limit the number of personnel that enter a building if the situation can be handled safely by a smaller crew. If you must enter a building, first ask if anyone in the building has been feeling unwell or had close contact with a person who has COVID-19. If you find either of these to be the case and you must enter the building,



use the proper PPE. Doff the PPE as soon as you leave the building and immediately wash your hands thoroughly.

Be aware of emergency occupancy changes in your community. As more people are impacted by COVID-19, it may become necessary to establish medical treatment surge facilities and isolation shelters in your community. The Division of Fire Safety will be monitoring this situation through the State Emergency Operations Center and will keep local department officials informed of any such plans in their communities. Keep apprised of these changes as they may need to be placed in occupancy types that serve this purpose but were not originally designed for this use. These uses may necessitate that departments develop or revise their pre-plans for potential emergencies at these locations.

Consider withholding outdoor burn permits.

A statewide burn ban can only be established during periods of extreme fire hazard, which is not applicable in the current situation. Town Forest Fire Wardens have the authority to cease the issuance of burn permits. By doing so, you may be able to limit the potential for personnel exposure as well as reserve the resources that would be needed for a wildland fire to make them available for other response activities.

Check on the wellbeing of your responders. Check on your members often to ensure that you maintain a strong emergency force. In addition to developing illness, recognize how the stress of not working, schools being closed, and many more unknown circumstances can take a toll on your responders and negatively impact this wellbeing.

COVID-19 Cost Recovery for EMS and Fire Departments

FEMA is in the process of developing public assistance opportunities for Fire and EMS Departments. The details of this assistance are in the development stage and information is available at the following website: https://www.usfa.fema.gov/current_events/031820.html

References and Resources

International Association of Fire Chiefs, *Guide for Coronavirus Planning & Response*, March 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/coronavirus-covid-19>

U.S. Fire Administration, *Information for First Responders on Maintaining Operational Capabilities During a Pandemic, Revised March 2020*, Retrieved from https://www.usfa.fema.gov/current_events/coronavirus.html

Vermont Department of Health, *Vermont EMS Memorandum, Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Personal Protective Equipment Update*, March 19, 2020.

Vermont Department of Health, <https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/infectious-disease/2019-novel-coronavirus>

Vermont Department of Public Safety, Division of Fire Safety, <https://firesafety.vermont.gov/Firesafety/covid-19fdresources>

