



# Firefighter Training Requirements in Tennessee

## Report with Recommendations for Tennessee Municipalities

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September 2023

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At UT MTAS, we are asked several times annually what training firefighters must or are required to complete. The answer to this question is it depends. It depends on which of the 95 Tennessee counties or 345 municipalities the fire department the firefighter will serve in is located. Required firefighter training in Tennessee ranges from almost none to very minimal.

At the local level, fire department training activities should continue, as the Insurance Services Office (ISO) has not relaxed any training hours listed in the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS). ISO pro-rates the credit awarded for meeting the different training standards, so the fire department should be proactive in obtaining as many training hours as possible to avoid receiving reduced training credit from ISO. MTAS consultants recommend hand washing/hand sanitizer and social distancing in the classroom. Social distancing should be practiced on the drill ground as much as possible, given the specific training drill. Online training is also an option.

Every community in Tennessee has some level of fire protection, but the level of protection and the qualifications of the firefighters staffing the community's fire stations varies across the state. Firefighting is a dangerous and demanding job that requires specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities. The best way to acquire and maintain this specialized skill set is through a comprehensive training program for both new recruits and seasoned firefighters. This article will discuss Tennessee's three levels of firefighter training and certification.

The first level is locally defined. At this level, the local governing body, or the fire department, sets the minimum standards for hiring, training, and promoting firefighters. The standards can vary from no-training-is-required up to certain levels of state certification. Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 4-24-112 sets the minimum training standard for Tennessee, but that same law exempts firefighters in thirty-five counties (Benton, Bledsoe, Bradley, Cannon, Cheatham, Claiborne, Clay, Cumberland, Decatur, Fentress, Giles, Grainger, Hancock, Haywood, Hickman, Houston, Humphreys, Johnson, Lake, Lawrence, Lewis, Loudon, Macon, Meigs, Morgan, Overton, Perry, Pickett, Polk, Scott, Smith, Trousdale, Unicoi, Union), or 36.84% of the counties across the state, from the minimum training requirements.

There is no requirement for firefighters in the exempted thirty-five counties to obtain any firefighter training at all. However, it is important to note that even though compliance is not required, compliance is not prohibited, either. All

cities, counties, and fire departments can provide as much training as they desire. It is also possible for an exempt city or county to opt out of the exemption and require compliance with the law. An example of a resolution to do just that may be found on the MTAS website at <https://mrln.mtas.tennessee.edu/se/final/Portal/Shared.aspx?component=ACCM&record=fbbdb723-e928-4b54-9b0b-e1fb6fbe69d8>

The second level is compliance with the state's minimum training law, which applies to volunteer and career firefighters. The minimum training law was passed in 2009 and codified as T.C.A. § 4-24-112. All firefighters (except for a few exceptions listed in the law) who are not in one of the thirty-five exempt counties are required by state law to meet the minimum training standard. The minimum training standard requires a newly hired or appointed firefighter to complete a 16-hour introductory class before responding to a fire. After completing this 16-hour introductory class, the firefighter must, within 36 months from their date of hire or appointment, complete a 64-hour basic firefighting classroom course and a 16-hour live burn course. Altogether, the law requires a total of 96 hours of training. Once the firefighter has completed this training, they comply with state law, and no further training is required by state law. Once a firefighter complies with T.C.A. § 4-24-112, there is no requirement for any state fire commission certification.

The third level is certification. Certification is the confirmation by an independent party that the firefighter has demonstrated comprehensive knowledge and skill of the subject by passing a practical and written examination based on national standards. The Tennessee Commission on Fire Fighting Personnel Standards and Education (the Commission), created by T.C.A. § 4-24-101, certifies volunteer and paid firefighters in Tennessee. The certifications issued by the Tennessee Fire Commission are accredited by two accrediting agencies: the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) and the National Board of Professional Qualifications (ProBoard). To become certified, a candidate must complete the required training curriculum and pass practical and written exams administered and proctored by a Commission field representative. These exams are based on consensus standards promulgated by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

In Tennessee, a firefighter's highest level of certification is Fire Fighter-II. To become certified as a Fire Fighter-II by the Commission, the candidate must meet the age and educational requirements, complete the approved training curriculum, and successfully pass practical and written exams for the following:

1. Be a minimum of 18 years of age;
2. Have earned a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED);
3. Provide local certification that the candidate has successfully

completed the 96 hours of minimum training as required by T.C.A. § 4-24- 112;

4. Hazardous Materials Awareness (HMA) per NFPA 1072 2017 Edition;
5. Hazardous Materials Operations (HMO) per NFPA 1072 2017 Edition;
6. Practical Exam for Fire Fighter I (FF-I) per NFPA 1001, 2019 Edition;
7. Written examination for Fire Fighter I (FF-I) per NFPA 1001, 2019 Edition;
8. Practical Exam for Fire Fighter II (FF-II) per NFPA 1001, 2019 Edition; and
9. Written examination for Fire Fighter II (FF-II) per NFPA 1001, 2019 Edition.

To help firefighters become Fire Fighter-II certified, the Tennessee Fire and Codes Enforcement Academy (TFACA) offers a 10-week, 400-hour Fire Fighter I/II recruit course at the fire academy in Bell Buckle that prepares recruits to take and pass the Commission exams for Fire Fighter-I and Fire Fighter-II. The course fee for instate students as of the date of this publication is \$567.00. For instate students, meals are \$25.00 daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. A dormitory on campus with a room rate of \$65.00 daily includes the three meals. The following link to Acadis allows prospective students to get a PSID number, browse courses, and register for selected courses:

<https://tdci.acadisonline.com/acadisviewer/login.aspx>

The physical address and contact information for the Tennessee Fire and Codes Academy is:  
Tennessee Fire Service and Code Enforcement Academy  
2161 Unionville-Deason Road  
Bell Buckle, Tennessee 37020 1.800.747.8868  
(931)294-4111; email: [tfaca.info@state.tn.us](mailto:tfaca.info@state.tn.us)

Within this framework, each fire department usually sets its own minimum standards for hiring and training. Some departments may require that a person have some level of training or certification before they are hired, while others may require that a given level of training or certification is obtained within a set timeframe after the person is hired.

Other training required of anyone in Tennessee who drives an emergency vehicle in an official capacity includes at least two hours of training, with an exam, in the operation of an emergency vehicle in emergency and non-emergency situations. This is required by T.C.A. § 55-8-194, commonly known as the Vanessa K. Free Emergency Services Training Act.

Newly appointed fire chiefs are required by T.C.A. § 68-102-108(c) to complete the sixteen-hour fire chief orientation course presented by the fire academy within one year of their appointment date. The sixteen-hour class is tuition-free and covers fire incident reporting, fire cause determination, legal

requirements for fire chiefs, basic management skills, fire service agencies and associations, and fire service requirements in Tennessee.

Just because training is not required does not mean firefighters do not need training, and there are guidelines local government and fire departments can use when establishing a fire department training program. The Insurance Services Office (ISO) outlines in the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS) the different types of fire department training ISO looks for when evaluating a community's level of fire protection. ISO does not distinguish between volunteer, combination, and paid fire departments or firefighters: the listed hours apply equally to departments.

The first type of training is called drills. Drills are practical, hands-on training and must occur at a fire department training facility. Examples of drill training include raising ladders, advancing hose lines, search and rescue drills in smoke conditions, and fighting live fires. A training facility is used solely for firefighter training and contains three components: a live fire training structure with a smoke room, a drill tower at least three stories in height, and an open area of at least two acres in size. For the maximum training credit, ISO annually awards every person who responds to structure fires, including chiefs and other officers, up to 16 hours of drill training credit.

The next type of training is called company training. Company training is usually classroom training and can include practical drills at locations other than the fire department training facility. Examples of company training include classes on firefighting tactics and fire prevention and site visits to local occupancies for the purpose of pre-fire planning. For the maximum training credit ISO awards, every person who responds to structure fires, including chiefs and other officers, needs 192 hours of company training annually.

Fire officers specialized training. Officer training is usually classroom training on any topic found in NFPA Standards 1021, 1521, and 1561. Examples of officer training include classes on firefighting tactics, fire ground operations, fire department safety practices, and incident command. For the maximum training credit ISO awards, every fire officer needs 12 hours of officer training annually and be certified to the Fire Officer I level.

New driver training. Driver training for new drivers occurs in the classroom, at the pump panel, and behind the wheel. Examples of driver training include classes on hydraulics, calculating pump pressures, operating fire apparatus, and driving fire apparatus. For the maximum training credit ISO awards, every newly appointed or promoted driver needs 60 hours of specialized training within their first year of appointment or promotion.

Next is existing driver training. Driver training for existing drivers occurs in the

classroom, at the pump panel, and behind the wheel. Examples of driver training include classes on hydraulics, calculating pump pressures, operating fire apparatus, and driving fire apparatus. For the maximum training credit ISO awards, every existing driver needs 12 hours of specialized training annually.

Next is hazardous materials training. Hazardous materials training usually occurs in the classroom, including practical training evolutions. Examples of hazardous materials training include classes on chemicals and their classification, determining isolation zones, and decontaminating people exposed to hazardous materials. For the maximum training credit ISO awards, every firefighter, including chiefs and other officers, needs 6 hours of hazardous materials training annually.

The last item in the ISO training section is recruit training. For the maximum training credit ISO awards, every recruit-level firefighter needs 240 hours of training per NFPA Standard 1001 or certification as a Fire Fighter-II. The training hours or certification must be achieved within 12 months of being hired or appointed as a firefighter.

The real answer to the question about what training firefighters are required to complete is that it doesn't matter how much training firefighters are required to have; what matters is how much training they should have. Training is foundational to the competency of the firefighters of any fire department, whether a volunteer or a paid firefighter.

Being competent at the skills related to a job that can kill you or your customers requires ongoing training and the practical application of skills in a training environment. Training promotes teamwork and builds pride and confidence in one's abilities, which enables better performance on the fire scene. Fire chiefs that allow firefighters to respond to incidents without the proper training and being tested for competency put themselves, other firefighters, and the public at risk. It is incumbent on every fire chief and elected official to provide the best training program for the firefighters of their fire department because their community deserves nothing less.

This information was originally authored by MTAS Fire Management Consultant Dennis Wolf (retired) and published in the Tennessee Town & City, Tennessee Municipal League, February 9, 2021, edition. This report was revised on September 25, 2023, by MTAS Fire Management Consultant Steven Cross.



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