



Municipal Technical Advisory Service
INSTITUTE *for* PUBLIC SERVICE

Firefighter Training in Tennessee

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MTAS is often asked about what training firefighters are required to have. The answer is that, from a standpoint of required training, the training requirements for firefighters vary from none-at-all to minimal. The key word in this question is “required,” being defined as mandatory by a state law or regulation.

The coronavirus pandemic has caused major disruptions to normal training activities. The Tennessee Fire and Codes Enforcement Academy (TFACA) is conducting training and the campus is open. Students attending courses on campus must provide documentation of a negative test for COVID. The COVID test should be administered no more than 14 days before the start date of training. Students are screened each day with CDC approved questions including temperature checks. Social distancing is in place in buildings. Masks are required in classroom settings and where social distancing cannot be maintained.

At the local level, fire department training activities should continue, as the Insurance Services Office (ISO) has not relaxed any of the 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 strive to obtain as many training hours as possible to avoid receiving reduced training credit from ISO. MTAS recommends the use of masks, hand washing/hand sanitizer, and social distancing in the classroom. On the drill ground, masks and social distancing should be practiced as much as possible given the specific training drill. On-line 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 the three levels of firefighter training and certification found in Tennessee.

The first level is locally defined. At this level, the local governing body, or the fire department, sets the minimum standards required for the hiring, training, and promotion of firefighters. The standards can vary from no-training-is-required up to certification. Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 4-24-112 sets the minimum training standard for Tennessee, but that same law exempts thirty-four counties (Benton, Bledsoe, Bradley, Cannon, Cheatham, Claiborne, Clay, Cumberland, Decatur, Fentress, Giles, Grainger, Hancock, Hickman, Houston, Humphreys, Johnson, Lake, Lawrence, Lewis, Loudon, Macon, Meigs, Morgan, Overton, Perry, Pickett, Polk, Rhea, Scott, Smith, Trousdale, Unicoi, Union), or 35.79% of the state, from the minimum training requirements. There is no requirement for firefighters in those thirty-four counties to obtain any firefighter training at all. It must be pointed out that even though compliance with the minimum training law is not required in those counties, compliance is not prohibited, either. All cities, counties, and fire departments are free to 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 <http://www.mtas.tennessee.edu/knowledgebase/sneedville-fire-resolution-minimum-training-standards-firefighters>.

The second level is compliance with the state's minimum training law, which applies to both volunteer and paid 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-four exempt counties are required by state law to meet the minimum training standard. The minimum training standard requires that a newly hired or appointed firefighter complete a 16-hour introductory class before responding to a fire. After completing the introductory class, the firefighter has 36 months from their hire or appointment date to 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. Compliance with T.C.A. § 4-24-112 does not confer any type of 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 given subject by passing written and practical examinations based on national standards on the subject. The Tennessee Commission on Firefighting Personnel Standards and Education (the Commission), created by T.C.A. § 4-24-101, is responsible for the certification of volunteer and paid firefighters in the State of Tennessee. The Commission is also accredited by two outside agencies: the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC), and the National Board of Professional Qualifications (ProBoard). To become certified, a candidate must pass

written and practical 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, the highest level of certification for a firefighter is Fire Fighter-II. To become certified as a Fire Fighter-II by the Commission, the candidate must complete and must successfully pass written and practical exams for the following:

1. Provide local certification that the candidate has successfully completed the 96 hours of minimum training required by T.C.A. § 4-24-112
2. Hazardous Materials Awareness (HMA) per NFPA 1072
3. Hazardous Materials Operations (HMO) per NFPA 1072
4. Written examination for Fire Fighter I (FF-I) per NFPA 1001, 2013 edition
5. Practical Exam for Fire Fighter I (FF-I) per NFPA 1001, 2013 edition
6. Written examination for Fire Fighter II (FF-II) per NFPA 1001, 2013 edition
7. Practical Exam for Fire Fighter II (FF-II) per NFPA 1001, 2013 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 (course ID F100) 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 is \$567.00. Lodging and meals are separate and are available at the academy. Here is the link to information on the course: <https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/commerce/tfaca/fire-program/general-fire-service/f100.html>

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Within this framework, each fire department usually sets their 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 an appropriate 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, more 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 date of appointment. The sixteen-hour, tuition free, class 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 the state of Tennessee.

Simply because training is not required does not mean that 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 FSRS the different types of fire department training ISO looks for when evaluating a community's level of fire protection. ISO does not differentiate between volunteer, combination, and paid fire departments: the listed hours apply equally.

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 at least two acres in size. For the maximum training credit ISO awards, every person who responds to structure fires, including chiefs and other officers, needs 16 hours of drill training annually.

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, on 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.

Next is officer 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, fireground 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.

Next is 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 driver 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 driver training annually.

Next is hazardous materials training. Hazardous materials training usually occurs in the classroom and can include practical training evolutions. Examples of hazardous materials training include classes on chemicals and their classification, determining isolation zones, and decontamination of 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 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 have is that it doesn't matter about how much training firefighters are required to have: what matters is how much they should have. Training is the backbone of any fire department, whether one is a volunteer or a paid firefighter.

To be good at the job that can kill you 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. Firefighters who respond without the proper training put themselves, other firefighters, and the public at risk. It is incumbent of every fire chief, and on elected officials, to provide the best training program for their fire department, because their community deserves nothing less.

This information was also published in the Tennessee Town & City, Tennessee Municipal League, February 9, 2021.