

# MENDOTA HEIGHTS FIRE DEPARTMENT



## 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

As the chief of the Mendota Heights Fire Department (MHFD), I am pleased to present the Mendota Heights Fire Department's 2021 Annual Report. Included in the report is statistical data, as well as a look back at some of the activities, accomplishments, and changes that occurred.

As you will see in this report, the men and women of the department responded to 329 emergency calls and participated in 4,000 hours of training in 2021. What you won't see in the report is how those numbers have changed over time. Over the last 10 years, the call volume has risen from an average of 265 calls per year to an average of 330 calls per year; an approximate 20% increase. I am always cautious when comparing call volumes from year to year because they can spike in any given year for a variety of reasons. The reasons for the increase in calls does not directly reflect that Mendota Heights is "less safe" or that our public education efforts are less effective.

One statistic that more clearly reflects changes in the fire service or the growth of a department over the years is the amount of time spent training. In 2012, the department logged 2,200 training hours. Since then, the number of department-wide training hours has increased by approximately 175 hours per year, to 4,000 training hours in 2021.

Most of the increase in call volume and training hours over the years is a result of what I call the Swiss Army Knife effect; a tool known for its diverse set of expandable instruments. The modern fire department has evolved into the Swiss Army Knife of a community's emergency response. Not only do we put out fires, we respond to an increasingly diverse range of calls. We help local paramedics with everything from lift assists to cardiac arrests; investigate suspicious odors; perform rope rescue; mitigate gas leaks; assist with traffic control; extricate victims from serious vehicle accidents; provide community education; perform other rescues, such as when a biker crashes on a remote path; search for missing people; respond to chemical spills; manage

down power lines; remove individuals from stalled elevators; and conduct water and ice rescue. In addition to our ever-expanding role, we respond to call types that did not exist five or 10 years ago, and we respond with more advanced equipment – both of which leads to increased call volume and the need for additional training. Because being a first responder can be very stressful, the department also recently began training on how to manage our own mental and physical health.

The individuals of the Mendota Heights Fire Department understand that providing outstanding customer service – being that Swiss Army Knife – is why we exist. We continually evaluate, change, and evolve our programs and processes so that we can provide the best service possible in a timely, professional, and economic manner. Each member of the MHFD is proud to be a part of the team that responds when you call for help.

*Chief Dave Dreehan*  
*Mendota Heights Fire Department*



Fire Relief Association Message	2	Firefighter Training	6
Firefighter Retirements	3	Firefighter Recruitment	7
Ready for Water Rescue	3	Public Education	8
Call Summary	4 - 5		



## A message from the Mendota Heights Fire Relief Association

When you hear “Relief Association” you may think of groups such as the Red Cross assisting in the aftermath of a natural disaster. However, when it relates to the fire service, the Mendota Heights Fire Relief Association serves an entirely different purpose. Rather than providing aid during a catastrophic event, a fire service relief association manages the retirement funds for the department’s membership.

Every year the city of Mendota Heights and State of Minnesota contribute

financially to the Fire Relief Association’s retirement pension fund. This fund is managed by the State of Minnesota, and features a balanced portfolio designed for long-term growth. Once a member reaches their 20-year anniversary, they become fully vested upon retirement. This pension serves as a benefit for a long and dedicated career in service to the city and community. Additionally, it also serves as a selling point to anyone who may be interested in dedicating their time, efforts, and energies to the



community through membership in the Mendota Heights Fire Department.

Beyond managing the department’s retirement fund, the Fire Relief Association also manages the department’s fundraising efforts to support various projects not covered in the city budget, such as the annual retirement banquet, scholarship programs, and community engagement activities.



## Support the Fire Relief Association

The Fire Relief Association is always happy to accept donations. If you wish to support its efforts, please mail a check payable to the Mendota Heights Fire Relief Association to:

Mendota Heights Fire Department  
2121 Dodd Road  
Mendota Heights, Minnesota 55120

*The above statement has been prepared and paid for by the Mendota Heights Fire Relief Association.*



Firefighter Gordy Skjerven



Captain Jeff Stenhaug



## In Recognition of Service: Retirements

In the United States, the average person stays at one job for 4.2 years. In 2021, the Mendota Heights Fire Department had two members retire with over four decades of service. Firefighter Gordy Skjerven and Captain Jeff Stenhaug each retired with over 41 years of service to the citizens of Mendota Heights, Mendota, Sunfish Lake and Lilydale. Their achievements were quite remarkable and their dedication nothing less than incredible.

Gordy Skjerven joined the department October 8 of 1980 and retired October 31 of 2021. In addition to his firefighting duties, Gordy was the treasurer of the Fire Relief Association for 39 of his 41 years on the department. Throughout his career, Gordy participated in countless committees and represented the department at dozens of functions at the local and state level.

Jeff Stenhaug joined the department August 5 of 1980 and retired August 31 of 2021. Jeff was a captain for 36 of his 41 years. In addition to his firefighting duties, Jeff was one of the original members of the Dakota County Special Operations Team comprised of firefighters from departments throughout the county who had specialized training in Hazardous Material, Rope Rescue, Structural Collapse Rescue and Trench Rescue. In addition to his duties as a captain and involvement on the special operations team, Jeff found a way to lead or participate in just about every committee or activity the department needed or sponsored.

The MHFD will greatly miss both Gordy and Jeff, and is grateful for their dedication, involvement and willingness to pour so much of themselves into making the department what it is today.



## Ready for Water Rescue

The Mendota Heights Fire Department responds to much more than fires and emergency medical calls. With multiple lakes in its coverage and neighboring areas, as well as nearly 2.5 miles of river frontage, the department is equipped to respond to water emergencies. Since 2007, the department has operated a Zodiac inflatable rescue boat. However, in early 2021, a mechanical failure of the vessel during a training exercise nearly caused the boat to sink. Unfortunately, the boat was unrepairable and needed to be retired. After research and review, a new boat was ordered and it delivered in late 2021. The vessel, manufactured by AB Boats, is 14-feet long, carries up to eight people, has a shallow aluminum V-shaped hull, is equipped with a light tower, and is powered by a Mercury 25 horsepower motor with electric start. The combined heavy-duty aluminum hull and side tubes make the boat perfect for navigating the strong currents of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers. With the delivery of the new rescue boat, the MHFD continues to work to keep the community safe on ground and on water.



## 2021 Summary of Fire Calls

FIRES	Mendota Heights	Lilydale	Mendota	Sunfish Lake	Total
Building fire	3	0	0	0	3
Cooking fire, confined to container	3	1	0	0	4
Vehicle fire	7	1	0	0	8
Grass fire	3	0	1	0	4
Outside rubbish, trash or waste fire	3	0	0	0	3
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>

OVERPRESSURE EXPLOSION, OVERHEAT (No Fire)	Mendota Heights	Lilydale	Mendota	Sunfish Lake	Total
Overpressure, rupture	1	0	0	0	1
Excessive heat, scorch burns with no ignition	2	1	0	0	3
	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>

RESCUE & EMERGENCY SERVICE	Mendota Heights	Lilydale	Mendota	Sunfish Lake	Total
Provide medical assistance	29	6	3	3	41
Motor vehicle accident with injuries	7	0	0	1	8
Search for lost person	1	0	0	0	1
Extrication of victim(s) from vehicle	3	0	0	0	3
Removal of victim(s) from stalled elevator	2	0	0	0	2
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>55</b>

HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS (No Fire)	Mendota Heights	Lilydale	Mendota	Sunfish Lake	Total
Gasoline or other flammable liquid spill	2	0	0	0	2
Gas leak (Natural Gas or LPG)	16	0	0	1	17
Carbon monoxide incident	9	0	0	1	10
Overheated motor	5	0	0	1	6
Power line down	4	0	1	1	6
Arcing, shorted electrical equipment	4	1	0	0	5
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>46</b>



SERVICE CALL	Mendota Heights	Lilydale	Mendota	Sunfish Lake	Total
Person in distress	1	0	1	0	2
Smoke or odor removal	2	0	0	0	2
Assist police	3	1	0	0	4
Public service	3	0	0	0	3
Unauthorized burning	4	0	1	1	6
TOTALS:	13	1	2	1	17

GOOD INTENT	Mendota Heights	Lilydale	Mendota	Sunfish Lake	Total
Good Intent	1	1	0	0	2
Dispatched and cancelled	49	5	0	2	56
No incident found on arrival at dispatch address	6	0	1	0	7
Authorized controlled burning	1	0	0	0	1
Smoke scare, odor of smoke	5	0	0	0	5
HazMat release investigation with no HazMat	9	0	0	0	9
TOTALS:	71	6	1	2	80

FALSE ALARM AND FALSE CALLS	Mendota Heights	Lilydale	Mendota	Sunfish Lake	Total
Local alarm system, malicious false alarm	1	0	0	0	1
Sprinkler or alarm activation due to malfunction	20	1	0	1	22
Unintentional transmission of alarm	38	1	0	1	40
TOTALS:	59	2	0	2	63

SEVERE WEATHER & NATURAL DISASTER	Mendota Heights	Lilydale	Mendota	Sunfish Lake	Total
Lightning strike (No Fire)	2	0	0	0	2
TOTALS:	2	0	0	0	2

GRAND TOTALS	289	19	8	13	329
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MUTUAL AID CALLS:	40
CALL TOTAL:	369

MUTUAL AID CALLS	
Eagan	4
Hastings	1
Inver Grove Heights	5
Red Wing	1
South St. Paul	1
West St. Paul	28
TOTAL	40





## Training: Advancements in Equipment

The Training Division supports the Mendota Heights Fire Department's mission to preserve and protect life and property from fire and other hazards through community education, emergency response and community service.

The year began at a full speed with training upon delivery of new Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) in January. Before this critical new equipment went into service, every firefighter completed extensive training. Some of the features of the new SCBA include the "buddy breather" system and the integrated Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC). These important new features improve the ability of firefighters to effectively do their job and do it more safely. The buddy breather system is a 36-inch hose, built into the SCBA, which allows firefighters to share the air in their bottle with another firefighter if they become trapped or run out of air. The Thermal Imaging Camera, built into the new SCBA, enables firefighters to "see" in a dark and smoke-filled environment. Previously, TICs were handheld and needed to be passed between firefighters.

Shortly after the new SCBAs went into service, the department took delivery of a new boat to replace a similar boat that was aged and removed from service because of a structural failure. The timing for delivery

worked out great as spring and summer were rapidly approaching. Again, a new piece of equipment required that every firefighter receive training on its operation and safe use in various deployment scenarios. The training was completed and the new boat placed into service.

Following the new equipment training, the normal department training schedule continued. Six new firefighters joined the department at the end of 2020 and accumulated 1,094 hours of training towards becoming regular firefighters by the end of 2021. Training consisted of department operations and required state certifications. Through partnership with the Northern Dakota Training Academy, the new recruits were able to get all of their core firefighting and EMS certifications.

In the fall of 2021, in partnership with the Mendota Heights Police Department, a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) was formed. This program educates volunteers about disaster preparedness for the hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills including fire safety, search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. CERT offers a consistent, nationwide approach to volunteer training and organization that supplements the traditional emergency responders. There was an overwhelming response to the program and the first CERT class graduated last December. Community members interested in volunteering for the CERT can learn more and complete a Volunteer Contact Form at [mendotaheightsmn.gov/volunteer](https://mendotaheightsmn.gov/volunteer).

## 2021 TRAINING HOURS

A total of **4,004 hours** of training were completed as a department, with each firefighter averaging about **120 hours** of training. The training covered all aspects of firefighting including **search** and **rescue**, fire hose **management**, fire ground **tactics**, **EMS** skills and live fire training.





*Mendota Heights firefighters performing ice rescue training at night.*

## Specialized Training

While the department trains regularly to handle fire, vehicle accident, medical, and similar types of calls, there are many other call scenarios that fall outside of its core training. To assist in these areas, the department can request the assistance of the Dakota County Special Operations Team (DCSOT). This team is made of fire, police, and EMS personnel from agencies across Dakota County specially trained to assist with hazardous materials incidents, confined space rescue, technical rope rescue, trench rescue, and structural collapse.

The MHFD has supported this county-based team since its inception, and has had several members participate on the team over the years. Mendota Heights Captain Dan Johnson is currently a DCSOT team member, serving as a high-quality resource to both the team and the department. DCSOT training takes place monthly, averaging an additional 100 hours per year per member outside of home agency training. Due to this extensive training and the equipment available to them, DCSOT assists with unique and challenging situations, and provides aid when called upon to neighboring counties and communities. In 2021, DCSOT provided high-angle rope rescue assistance to the Hastings Fire Department to help an individual who had fallen down a 30- to 40-foot cliff. The team also assisted Bloomington Fire with a collapsed trench at a residential construction site, and last November DCSOT was deployed on standby when President Biden visited Dakota County Technical College in Rosemount.



## Spearheading Recruitment Efforts

In 2021 the department formed a Recruitment and Retention Committee. In the past, the Fire Department advertised and hired new members annually and only during specific hiring periods. Individuals that were interested in becoming a firefighter had to wait until the department was accepting new applications before being formally introduced to the department and its members. With the formation of the new committee, hiring will still take place once a year, but the committee hopes to engage with interested candidates through a series of year-round informational sessions and activities.

Few professions provide the sense of accomplishment and personal enrichment that fire service professionals enjoy. There is tremendous satisfaction in having saved a life, controlled a structure fire, comforted an accident victim, or taught a skill that prevented a child from becoming injured. Becoming a part-time firefighter may be one of the most personally rewarding things that one could ever do.

If you have an interest in becoming a Mendota Heights firefighter, visit the MHFD recruitment booth or kiosk at upcoming city-sponsored events. You can also learn more at [mendotaheightsmn.gov/becomeafirefighter](https://mendotaheightsmn.gov/becomeafirefighter) or email [FDRecruiting@mendotaheightsmn.gov](mailto:FDRecruiting@mendotaheightsmn.gov).



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Fire Department  
1101 Victoria Curve  
Mendota Heights, MN 55118  
[mendotaheightsmn.gov](http://mendotaheightsmn.gov)



## In-Person Public Education Returns

2021 came in like a tornado and went out like a breeze. As things returned to a new type of normal, the Public Education team returned to in-person functions to deliver fire and life safety education.

The team visited some of the local elementary schools presenting to approximately 350 kindergarten and fourth-grade students. In-person Safety Camp also returned to Harmon Park, with 75 campers learning from and interacting with fire, police, and recreation personnel from Mendota Heights and West St. Paul over two days.

Last October, after a three-year gap, Public Education hosted the return of its in-person Fire Prevention Week Open House at the Fire Station. The event was well attended and it was great to connect face-to-face with neighbors once again. The Public Education team was also present at the Halloween Bonfire at Mendota Plaza where they spoke with people about fire and life safety topics.

The Public Education team continues to expand the type of outlets used to deliver fire safety information. Have you seen the messages on the city's digital sign in front of the fire station? How about life safety topics on the city's website, or in the *Heights Highlights* newsletter?

Moving into 2022, the Public Education team looks forward to expanding outreach and continuing to deliver fire and life safety messages and events to the people of Mendota Heights, Mendota, Lilydale, and Sunfish Lake.