



FY 2022 Recommended Budget Budget Question

Board Question #: 31

BUDGET QUESTION: Help us understand why there is overtime built into the 24/7 schedules of non-exempt Fire/Rescue personnel. What else could be done to reduce the overtime and what are the pros/cons of those alternatives? How are other departments' schedules set up?

RESPONDING DEPARTMENT/OFFICE: Fire/Rescue

RESPONSE: FREM's field staff is scheduled in a three shift schedule configuration 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our schedule averages out to be 56 hours per week for each employee. The Department of Labor's Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) provides an exception for firefighters to work greater than 40 hours in a week without incurring overtime at 1.5 times pay. The FLSA exemption (FLSA 7.K.) allows firefighters to work 212 hours in a 28 day pay cycle, where any hours worked beyond 212 hours are to be paid at a rate of 1.5 times regular pay. The allowable hours of 212 averages out to 53 hours per week which the net difference of our schedule is 3 hours per week or 12 hours per 28-day cycle (156 hours per year). This additional time is referred to as "built-in" or "scheduled" overtime. This practice and schedule is common in fire departments nationwide. The following fire departments are working a 56-hour schedule with built-in overtime: Alexandria, Arlington, Chesterfield, Fairfax County, Fairfax City, Henrico, James City, Prince William, Stafford, Richmond City, and Roanoke County.

Some departments have initiated a "Kelly" day, where an employee would be flexed off (sent home) for 12 hours every 28-day cycle. While this can work, it requires additional staff as "floaters" to help cover when the firefighter is sent home. For Spotsylvania's 11 stations, implementation of a "Kelly" day would require the hiring of 15 additional FTEs. FREM operates with minimal extra staff and currently only maintain additional staff to cover vacation, sick and family medical leave. Additionally, because of required training, special assignments, and leave usage, we average 3 personnel on overtime per shift each day. Prince William County and the City of Fredericksburg are on the same shift design as our department. They once used the "Kelly" day design but due to the complexities, they have both transitioned to the scheduled overtime concept.

An additional option that some departments use is a 24-on/72-off schedule. The average hours worked for this schedule is 42 hours per week, thus preventing built in overtime. Unfortunately, this would require the hiring of an additional shift (71 FTEs) at a much higher cost than that of the scheduled overtime. Loudoun County and the District of Columbia Fire Departments use this schedule. Loudoun County is currently transitioning to a 3 shift schedule similar to ours.

The current schedule we use is the most fiscally responsible means to achieve 24/7 staffing.

ESTIMATE OF STAFF TIME SPENT ON RESPONSE: