

# Newsletter



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## Chief's Message from Chief Bill McLaughlin

You may know that the Elk Creek Fire District is requesting a mill levy this November. The fire district has seen a significant increase in calls for service. Funding has not kept pace with this increase.

So far this year, the fire department has responded to twenty structure fires. On average, there are now three to four 911 calls each day, and busy days can see ten or more calls.

*“With only two firefighter/paramedics on duty at any given time, the fire district is getting stretched thinner each year.”*

Most of these emergency requests occur during the day — when volunteers are least available. Many of the calls overlap, with two, three or four calls at the same time. There are two paramedics working each day, and an average medical call takes two and a half to three hours. When that second 911 call comes in and the on-duty paramedics are already gone, the response to the second call is delayed until volunteers can come to the station, then drive to the call... if any volunteers are available in the first place.



Across the country, the number of volunteers has been in decline for the past twenty years. In the 1980's, the fire district would have twenty volunteers showing up for the three or four structure fires each year. Now, only three or four show up to numerous structure fires a year. The fire district has had to rely more and more on the career firefighter/paramedics to cover emergency calls. With only two firefighter/paramedics on duty at any given time, the fire district is getting stretched thinner each year. While the fire district was able to increase to three firefighter/paramedics for a while using donations and grants, those extra positions have been lost by attrition, as revenue has gone down dramatically just over the past year. (cont. p2...)



## Upcoming Dates for Monthly CPR Classes:

**October 12th, November 9th, and December 14th (Saturdays, 8am to 5pm)**

Classes are free, unless a participant requires an official course completion card, then there is a \$20 fee

Sign up online at: [www.elkcreekfire.org](http://www.elkcreekfire.org)



**Chief's Message cont.**

***“The Elk Creek Fire District has the lowest mill levy in the Front Range.”***

Another change since the 1980's is the increasing wildfire danger. The weather is getting hotter and drier, and with it, wildfires are getting far more frequent and intense. In 1989, Colorado saw its first fire that burned more than 20 homes. In the past seven years, fires in Colorado have now burned homes in the hundreds. Even this year, following a snowy winter and wet spring, two wildfires in the area have burned 25 and 70 acres. Fortunately, neither were in neighborhoods. Had those fires started closer to homes, dozens of homes could have been lost. As we send this to print, a third local fire threatens Bailey.



Grants to the fire district have helped tremendously by providing a 10-person wildland fire crew. When they are not fighting fire, those firefighters chip slash for homeowners free of charge and mitigate forests under contract with the state forestry agency. With some of those grants ending, the chipping and mitigation programs will also end unless local funding is provided.

The fire district is doing what it can with the limited resources it has. The Elk Creek Fire District has the lowest mill levy in the Front Range. Without bringing the mill levy up to par with neighboring fire districts, the possibility of keeping up with the growing need for fire and EMS is slim. We have included a fact sheet about the mill levy within this newsletter so that you may be more informed.



## **Spotlight on Health:** ***Suicide Prevention***



September is *Suicide Prevention Awareness Month*, so in this issue we focus on this very real and very important threat to our community.

On average, one person dies by suicide every seven hours in the state of Colorado. Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death in Coloradans aged 15 to 44, and the 7<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in Colorado overall. In 2016, nearly 45,000 people died by suicide in the United States.

***“Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death in Coloradans aged 15 to 44.”***

Mental health and issues of suicide remain taboo, and both those with suicidal thoughts as well as suicide loss survivors (families and friends affected by suicide) often deal with stigma and feelings of shame that prevent them from reaching out for help or talking openly.

While suicidal thoughts are sometimes symptomatic of an overall mental health condition, over 50% of individuals who died by suicide never had a mental health diagnosis. Many things contribute to suicide or suicidal thoughts such as difficulties with relationships, substance use or physical health, a recent or impending crisis, and job, money, legal, or housing stress. ANYONE could be struggling with suicide, and being able to talk about it openly is the first step toward healing.

### **Do YOU need help?**

### **Do THEY need help?**

Knowing the warning signs for suicide can help you determine if you or someone you care about is at risk. These signs are particularly relevant if the behavior is new, has increased, or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change. If you or someone you know exhibits the behaviors listed in the graphic on the following page, seek help. (cont. p3...)



Spotlight on Health cont.

**5 Steps to Help Someone at Risk**  
(per the Suicide Prevention Lifeline)

**Know the Suicide WARNING SIGNS**

- Feeling like a burden
- Being isolated
- Increased anxiety
- Feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Increased substance use
- Looking for a way to access lethal means
- Increased anger or rage
- Extreme mood swings
- Expressing hopelessness
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Talking or posting about wanting to die
- Making plans for suicide

Graphic from [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**ASK:** Be direct and approach them in a non-judgmental and supportive way. Ask, “Are you thinking about suicide?” Studies show that asking **does not** increase suicides or suicidal thoughts. Acknowledging and talking about suicide may, in fact, reduce rather than increase suicidal ideation. After you ask, be prepared to LISTEN and to take them seriously.

**KEEP THEM SAFE:** Establish immediate safety. Find out: Have they already tried? Do they have a plan? What is the timing of their plan? Do they have access to lethal means? The more pieces of a plan already in place, the higher the risk. Reducing access to lethal means is an important part of suicide prevention. Help put **time** and **distance** between the person and their chosen method.

**BE THERE:** You can be physically present, on the phone, or available in some other supportive way. Being there for someone having thoughts of suicide can be lifesaving. Increasing someone’s **connectedness** to others and limiting their isolation (short and long-term) has shown to be a protective factor against suicide. Do not commit to anything you are not willing or able to do.

**HELP THEM CONNECT:** Help them establish a safety net for when they find themselves in crisis. This may be a telephone crisis hotline, support and resources in their communities, mental health counseling, or taking them to a hospital or calling 911 if you feel there is imminent danger. You can also help them develop a

safety plan including ways of identifying the onset of suicidal thoughts and what to do in crisis moments. The plan can include a list of individuals to contact when this happens. For smart phone users, the app My3 ([www.my3app.org](http://www.my3app.org)) can help develop plans and provides quick access.

**FOLLOW UP:** After you’ve connected them with immediate support systems, make sure to follow up and see how they are doing. This is an opportunity to see if there is anything you can do to help and to follow up with anything you said you would do. Following up and future contact can increase feelings of connectedness – a factor in risk reduction.

Although it may sometimes be difficult to realize, reaching out for help is always an option. Suicide or crisis hotlines are an excellent resource to start with (confidential and free). People call to talk about lots of things: substance abuse, economic worries, relationships, sexual identity, dealing with abuse, depression, mental and physical illness, and loneliness, to name a few. Here are some numbers if you or a loved one needs help:

**\*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) \*Crisis Text Line: text 741741**

**\*Colorado Crisis Service: 1-844-493-TALK (8255) or text “TALK” to 38255**



*Never keep it a secret if someone tells you about a plan to hurt themselves. Get them help. And, start talking with the people around you. We will all benefit from honest conversations about mental health and suicide.*

Sources and statistics for this article and additional info at:

- [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
- [www.coloradocrisiservices.org](http://www.coloradocrisiservices.org)
- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)
- [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)





# November 2019 Mill Levy

# FACTS

The Elk Creek Fire Protection District (ECPFD) serves 98 square miles of wildland-urban interface area in Jefferson and Park counties. It serves a population of approximately 15,000 and growing. Requests for emergency medical services are steadily increasing, the number of housefires in the district is higher than past years, and wildfire risk remains a significant threat. (The Elk Creek Fire Protection District has a higher risk rating than Paradise, California, where the deadly 2018 Camp Fire took place.) It is not a matter of “if” but “when” we will deal with a significant wildfire in this area.

While population, wildfire risk and the need for emergency service continues to grow, revenue continues to decrease, and Elk Creek Fire Protection District still has the lowest mill levy in the entire Front Range.

Since the 2013 mill increase, the residential assessment rate has fallen from 9.13% to 7.15%. It is forecast to fall to roughly 6.5% by 2022. (This is due to Gallagher Amendment impacts.) This translates to less and less funding for the fire department. Ambulance revenue has also fallen; decreasing revenue from Medicare and Medicaid has caused an already only 50% recovery rate to drop to 43% since 2014. As the population ages, this percentage will continue to decrease.

Without adequate funding, cuts to service must take place, including a reduction in the level of ambulance service, the elimination of the community chipping program and the wildfire mitigation program, and the closure of some fire stations. To maintain these emergency services, Elk Creek Fire Protection District is proposing a mill levy on the November 2019 ballot.

## The main concerns facing the fire district are...



### Growing Wildfire Risk

A growing wildland urban interface is increasing wildfire risk in the ECPFD. Having staffing dedicated to wildland firefighting and mitigation services is critical.



### Increasing Emergency Medical Call Volume

Emergency call volume is on the rise with an increase in people and businesses. An aging population is also increasing call volume.



### Failing Water Cisterns

During the past winter, the fire district ran out of functioning water sources, putting the whole community at risk.





**Maintaining firefighter/  
paramedic staffing levels**

The ECFPD has lost two positions by attrition to higher-paying fire departments and — without funding — will need to lay off more.



**Obsolete and failing  
emergency equipment**

Over the next four years, at least two fire engines and two ambulances need replacing.



**Aging fire stations**

Some fire stations are over 40 years old, and all need major upgrades in heating, lighting, doors, and weatherproofing.

**Questions and ANSWERS...**

**What will happen without funding from a mill levy?**

The fire district will have to make multiple cuts including:

- *Staffing:* The district will have to lay off some firefighter/paramedics, putting increased strain on an already understaffed fire department.
- *Some ambulance transports:* With a reduction in staffing, residents may have to wait longer for an out of district ambulance service, and level of care may be reduced to Basic Life Support instead of Advanced.
- *The chipping program:* This service to homeowners was funded by a three year, non-renewable grant.
- *The wildland firefighting module and mitigation services:* The ten-person crew is funded in part by grants, but the fire district has to provide a cost share and would no longer be able to do so. The wildfire risk property assessment program that helps people keep their fire insurance would also be cut.
- *Fire stations:* Without funds to replace older fire engines, maintain fire stations and train new volunteers, at least two of the fire stations would have to be closed. (A home’s proximity to fire stations also impacts home insurance ratings.)

**How does ECFPD’s mill levy compare to other area fire departments?**

ECFPD has the lowest mill levy in the entire Front Range, at 7.47 mills. ECFPD is proposing an increase to 12.5 mills. Other local mill levies range from 14.29 (Platte Canyon Fire) to 12 (Indian Hills Fire).

**How much would a mill levy increase cost?**

For a \$400,000 house, an owner would pay an extra \$12.12 per month. This comes out to \$145.44 annually. Rates would be slightly less or slightly more for a house valued at less or more, respectively.

**How is the fire district funded?**

The fire department receives no county or state funding, and only occasional grants from the federal government. Over 75% of the fire district’s funding comes from property tax and 15% comes from ambulance revenue. The remaining 10% comes from car license plate fees, donations and other miscellaneous income.

**Where can I go for more information?**

You can view a slide show at [www.elkcreekfire.org](http://www.elkcreekfire.org) (scroll down on our home page). If you have specific questions, feel free to email us at [info@elkcreekfire.org](mailto:info@elkcreekfire.org).



# Chimney Maintenance 101

(It's Time to Clean Your Chimney!)

## WHAT?

### Chimney Maintenance:

Elk Creek Fire responds to multiple calls for chimney fires every year, many of which result in damage to other areas of the house. Having your chimney regularly inspected and maintained can reduce the risk of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning and can help avoid expensive repairs.

## WHY?

### Safety and Health:

- ◆ Creosote = Fire Hazard Creosote forms from gases and particles released from burning fuel. Creosote is black or brown and can appear flaky, sticky or glazed and is **extremely flammable**.
- ◆ Blockages = Carbon Monoxide and Fire Hazard Chimneys can become blocked by bird nests or other debris, which is often flammable. **Carbon monoxide** and other poisonous gases from the fire can flow back into the living area, putting you at serious risk. Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors and test them monthly.

### Prevention and Savings:

Regular inspections can detect damage before it becomes more serious and can help prevent the need for expensive repairs. Properly maintained chimneys and stoves also burn more cleanly and efficiently.

## WHO?

- ◆ Anyone with a wood stove, gas stove, or fireplace!
- ◆ Even gas furnaces, boilers and hot water heaters can vent through the chimney and cause build-up and corrosion.

## WHEN?

### What time of year?

Before you need to use it for the season. Late summer or early fall is perfect.

### How often?

At least once a year. Some types of stoves, fireplaces and chimneys may require maintenance more often. Different fuels and operator habits can also affect maintenance needs.

## HOW and HOW MUCH?

### How do I choose the right person for the job?

- ◆ General Considerations:
  - Hire a CSIA Certified Chimney Sweep. See [www.csia.org](http://www.csia.org) for a list of qualified professionals.
  - Look for reviews and recommendations from websites, local business organizations or neighbors.
- ◆ Questions to Ask:
  - Do they carry **liability insurance**?
  - Can they provide **references**?
  - Will there be a **certified sweep on site**?
  - How long have they been in business?
  - Are there any unresolved complaints against them?

### How much does it cost?

Usually between \$126 and \$356 per cleaning and inspection. It can be less for well-maintained chimneys and significantly more to remove large amounts of build-up or to make repairs.

(*HomeAdvisor.com and AngiesList.com*)

**Sources and resources:** National Fire Protection Association [www.nfpa.org/Public-Education](http://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education), Chimney Safety Institute of America [www.csia.org](http://www.csia.org), National Chimney Sweep Guild [www.ncwg.org](http://www.ncwg.org)



## POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS

### Chimney Fire:

- ◆ **Roaring noise, crackling, or popping sounds** (common with active chimney fires)
- ◆ **Flames, heavy black smoke, or pieces of creosote** coming from your chimney or pieces of creosote on your roof or on the ground around the chimney
- ◆ **Smoke coming into the living space** or seeping out between joints
- ◆ **Unpleasant or hot odor** coming from the fireplace

### Potential Damage:

- ◆ Missing or damaged chimney cap
- ◆ Cracks in chimney masonry
- ◆ Signs of settling, or water around the chimney base
- ◆ Damp patches on walls near gas appliances (possible venting problem)
- ◆ Erosion of mortar and bricks (from acidic deposits, water damage)

## WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

### Chimney Fire:

- ◆ **Your safety comes first!**
- ◆ **Call the fire department (911).**
- ◆ **Make sure everyone in the house knows** and is ready to leave.
- ◆ Only if you can do it safely:
  - Close fireplace or stove doors.
  - Close air intakes to the stove.
  - **Do not close the damper!** Make sure it is open (the damper allows gases, smoke and flames to escape the chimney).
- ◆ **In case of fire, GET OUT AND STAY OUT.**

## WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY cont.

### Carbon Monoxide (CO) Alarm:

- ◆ Do not ignore the beeping of the alarm.
- ◆ Move all people and pets outside to fresh air.
- ◆ If for some reason you are unable to leave the home, open all doors and windows so fresh air dilutes the CO (the alarm may go silent due to dilution — do not assume the CO or source of the problem is gone).
- ◆ Call 911 and have emergency services come test the home for the source of the CO.
- ◆ Recognize the symptoms of CO poisoning: headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, confusion, sleepiness — call 911 and get help! CO poisoning can be deadly.

## SAFETY AND MAINTENANCE TIPS

### Do

- ◆ **Have yearly inspections** and maintenance done.
- ◆ **Install and regularly test carbon monoxide and smoke alarms.**
- ◆ **Put ashes in a METAL bucket** with a lid; dump them away from the house and only after they are *completely cold* (this can take several days). You can mix them with water to be sure they are out.
- ◆ **Use a screen** for open fireplaces.
- ◆ Be aware of water around the chimney and places where water can get in (cracks, through the top), particularly in areas with frequent freeze/thaw cycles.

### Don't

- ◆ **Don't store flammable materials near your stove**, including firewood, kindling and paper.
- ◆ **Don't ignore signs of problems** or continue using a blocked or damaged chimney.
- ◆ **Don't burn green wood**; if you have to use it, mix it with seasoned wood. Green wood does not burn efficiently: it creates less usable heat and causes faster build-up of harmful deposits in your chimney.

### Focus on Forest Health

Many of the Douglas Fir trees in the area are looking brown. This is due to an outbreak of the **Western Spruce**



**Budworm.** Western Spruce Budworm is a native insect that feeds on new growth of fir and spruce trees, often killing them off. The budworm is the larva of a small moth that lays its eggs on the ends of branches. (The moth was seen in abundance this summer.) The eggs hatch into caterpillars that overwinter on the branches. When the tree puts out new growth in the spring, the caterpillars become active, eating the buds. While trees may survive a year or two of the budworms, longer outbreaks may kill the trees.

There are natural predators including many birds, chipmunks and squirrels. Larger outbreaks like the current one may not be controlled by predators. A cold snap during the winter may also limit the population. If, however, you are concerned about your trees, you may also consider insecticide treatment.

Visit [csfs.colostate.edu](http://csfs.colostate.edu) and search "Western Spruce Budworm" for more information or contact the Colorado State Forest Service in Golden at 303-279-9757.

## American Flag Retirement Program

Do you have old or worn out American flags that need to be properly disposed of? Elk Creek Fire is proud to offer a retirement program for all American flags. Simply drop off your old, worn, frayed, or damaged flags at Elk Creek Fire Station 1 and we will ensure it is given the proper and respectful retirement ceremony it deserves in accordance with the United States Flag Code (4 USC Sec 8 Para (k), as Amended July 7,1976).

Elk Creek Fire Station 1 is located at Hwy 285 and Richmond Hill at 11993 Blackfoot Road, Conifer, CO 80433. For more information regarding the display and use of the American flag, please visit [www.usa.gov/flag](http://www.usa.gov/flag).



**Elk Creek Fire Department**  
11993 Blackfoot Rd.  
PO Box 607  
Conifer, CO 80433

**Phone**  
303-816-9385  
**Website**  
[www.elkcreekfire.org](http://www.elkcreekfire.org)  
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