

FIRE WATCH

VRFA TO PLAY KEY ROLE IN NEW SOUTH KING COUNTY OPIOID CRISIS INITIATIVE

In response to the rising rates of opioid overdoses in South King County, a new initiative has been launched to improve access to Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) and harm reduction services. VRFA will be playing a key role in this project by identifying individuals with Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) and connecting them to essential services through a partnership with Health Point - Auburn.

Although the availability of MOUD has increased in King County, many residents, particularly in the south end of the county, still face significant barriers to accessing these life-saving treatments. The project aims to bridge this gap by directly linking individuals with OUD to MOUD care and harm reduction services, specifically targeting those



identified through the public safety sector. Two full-time VRFA Care Navigators will engage clients, providing them with overdose prevention resources, education, and warm hand-offs to MOUD providers. Often, the referral and hand-off are the only support clients receive; therefore, the two Care Navigators will be committed to continuous re-engagement if clients are slow or lacking in treatment.

By integrating Care Navigation staff into this effort, the initiative seeks to:

- Extend the continuum of care for OUD.
- Improve patient engagement and retention in OUD treatment through MOUD and harm reduction services.

This collaborative effort is designed to establish a strong linkage between public safety and healthcare providers, creating a cohesive support network for those battling OUD. The project is funded by a federal grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Overdose Data to Action program, which focuses on limiting overdose deaths through local collaborative actions.

This initiative represents a critical step forward in addressing the opioid crisis in South King County, offering hope and support to those who need it most.

What is Opioid Use Disorder (OUD)?

Opioid Use Disorder is a medical condition characterized by the compulsive use of opioids despite harmful consequences. It involves physical and psychological dependence, where individuals experience strong cravings, withdrawal symptoms, and an inability to control or reduce opioid use. OUD often leads to significant impairment in daily functioning and can result from both prescription opioid use and illicit drug use.

What are Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)?

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder are prescription drugs used to treat opioid use disorder by reducing cravings, withdrawal symptoms, and the risk of relapse. These medications include methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone. MOUD helps stabilize individuals, making it easier for them to engage in therapy and other aspects of recovery, and it is considered a key component of comprehensive treatment for opioid use disorder.

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK 2024

SMOKE ALARMS-MAKE THEM WORK FOR YOU!

We are teaming up again with the National Fire Protection Association™ (NFPA)—the official sponsor of Fire Prevention Week for over 100 years—to promote Fire Prevention Week™. This year’s theme is “Smoke Alarms- Make Them WORK for You!” The campaign, which runs October 6 - 12, strives to educate about the importance of having working smoke alarms in every home.

Why Smoke Alarms Matter

Smoke alarms are a vital part of any home’s safety plan. Due to the synthetic materials used in modern construction, homes now burn hotter and faster than they did 40 years ago, emitting toxic smoke and limiting the time you may have to escape to less than three minutes. Smoke alarms provide early detection, providing ample time for you and your family to escape. According to the NFPA, working smoke alarms can cut the risk of dying in a home fire by more than half. However, roughly three out of five fire deaths occurred in homes where either no smoke alarms were present or they were nonworking.

Valley Regional Fire Authority offers these key smoke alarm safety tips to protect yourself and your loved ones:

Installation:

- Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside each separate sleeping area [such as a hallway], and on each level [including the basement] of the home.
- When installing, follow the manufacturer’s instructions. Smoke alarms should be installed on the ceiling or high on the wall.

- For the best protection, interconnect all smoke alarms. When one sounds, they all sound.

Testing and Maintenance:

- Test your smoke alarms monthly. Press the test button to ensure the alarm is working. If you have



- trouble reaching your alarm(s), use a broom handle or ask for help.
- Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for cleaning to keep smoke alarms working.
- Never disable a smoke alarm. Do not “borrow” smoke alarm batteries for other uses, such as toys or radios.

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EMS SPOTLIGHT HOARDING DISORDER EMERGENCY CALLS

Hoarding disorder is a condition characterized by the excessive accumulation of items stored in a chaotic manner, which presents significant challenges to the safety and well-being of individuals and first responders. According to the American Psychiatric Association, approximately 2.6% of people nationwide have hoarding disorder, with higher rates among individuals over 60 years old and those with other psychiatric diagnoses, especially anxiety and depression. Typical hoarded items include newspapers, magazines, household goods, and clothing. Hoarding can be genetic, triggered by traumatic events, or a symptom of other disorders such as depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or dementia. Research indicates that hoarding typically begins in early adolescence and exacerbates as a person ages.



The Impact on the Patient and First Responders

- **Increased Fire Risk:** Hoarded items create a fire hazard by providing ample fuel for flames to spread rapidly. Cluttered spaces can also block exits and impede escape routes for occupants and firefighters.
- **Structural Instability:** The weight of accumulated items can compromise a building's structural integrity, putting occupants and firefighters at risk of collapse.
- **Hazardous Materials:** Hoarded items may include dangerous materials such as chemicals, flammable liquids, or biological contaminants, creating additional dangers.
- **Delayed Response:** Navigating cluttered spaces can significantly slow response times, reducing the chances of a successful rescue or fire suppression.
- **Mental and Emotional Toll:** The conditions found in hoarding situations can be emotionally distressing and psychologically challenging for patients, their loved ones and first responders.

When responding to a call involving hoarding, VRFA personnel will take risk mitigation steps. After assessing the scene, firefighters may use increased personal protective equipment, including Tyvek suits, gowns, and respiratory protection, to mitigate exposure to hazards. Additionally, firefighters may request that those who can meet them outside the residence continue care in a safer location. After addressing the patient's immediate needs, VRFA Firefighters will offer a follow-up visit with our CARES team to help them connect with additional mental health services.

HOARDING DISORDER RESOURCES

FREE SUPPORT GROUPS

- **Full Life Care Hoarding Support Group**
• Online Meeting every Wednesday 1-2:30pm
- **OCD Seattle Support Group**
• Online Meeting every 3rd Saturday of the month 10am-12pm
• Email seattleocd@gmail.com for meeting details

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

- Available through the King County Library System and in the Libby App
- **Buried in Treasures** by Tolin, Frost, and Steketee
- **Digging Out: Helping Your Loved One Manage Clutter, Hoarding, and Compulsive Acquiring** by Tompkins, Hartl, Frost, and Steketee

PODCAST

That Hoarder: Overcome Compulsive Hoarding
www.overcomecompulsivehoarding.co.uk

Podcast hosted by a woman living with hoarding disorder exploring topics of mental health, decluttering, and stigma with tips, tricks, and shared experiences of people who experience hoarding behaviors.

You can find the That Hoarder Podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or anywhere else you listen to podcasts.

PAID SERVICES

- **Casual Uncluttering** | 425-947-3976
Lauren Williams
<https://casualuncluttering.com>
- **Seattle Hoarding** | 206-260-2031
<https://seattlehoarding.com>
- **Service Masters** | 253-201-1270
<https://www.servicemasterrestore.com/residential/specialty-services/hoarding-cleanup/>
- **Additional Resources:**
fulllifecare.org/northwest-hoarding-coalition

WINTER WEATHER PREPAREDNESS



Winter is just around the corner. We encourage you to prepare your home and vehicle for winter weather and to be prepared for power outages.

Prepare Your Home

- Install/maintain smoke and carbon monoxide alarms
- Check flashlights and have extra batteries
- Protect pipes from freezing
- Store emergency food and water
- Have a radio and batteries for alerts and updates
- Keep rock salt ready for icy sidewalks
- Stock first aid supplies and medications

Prepare Your Vehicle

- Full tank of gas
- Blankets and warm clothing
- Flashlights and batteries
- Shovel, sand, and a snow brush
- Tire chains and jumper cables
- Phone charger
- Emergency food and water

Prepare for Power Outages

- Keep flashlights and batteries ready
- Check on neighbors
- Use generators outside and follow manufacturer's instructions
- Stay 35 feet away from downed power lines
- Provide food, water, and a warm shelter for pets
- Dress in layers of warm clothing

SCOUT NIGHT *at the Fire Station*



Wed., October 23
 5:30 - 8:30 PM

PSRFA Station 74
 24611 116th Ave SE
 Kent, WA 98030

RSVP Now

253.856.4480
PubEd@PugetSoundFire.org

Wed., November 6
 5:30 - 8:30 PM

VRFA Station 33
 500 182nd Ave E
 Auburn, WA 98092

RSVP Now

253.288.5881
Public.Info@vrfa.org






FIRE CHIEF'S MESSAGE



BRAD THOMPSON

I extend my deepest gratitude to you for your overwhelming support of Proposition 1 on the August Primary ballot. By renewing the Fire Benefit Charge (FBC) for the next ten years, you've ensured a stable and fair funding mechanism that allows the Valley Regional Fire Authority to continue meeting the needs of our growing community. Your vote of confidence reaffirms our commitment to providing the highest level of service, and we are honored to serve such a supportive community.

At VRFA, our vision is simple: to create the safest community to live, work, and visit.

Commitment to Excellence

At VRFA, our vision is simple: to create the safest community to live, work, and visit. This vision is the driving force behind our service, and your support ensures we can maintain the excellence you expect and deserve. Public safety is a cornerstone of our community, and we take our role as your protectors seriously.

Meeting the Growing Needs of Our Community

As our community grows, so too does the demand for our services. To meet these evolving needs, we're focusing on several key initiatives. They include:

- 1 Building New Fire Stations:** We are strategically planning and constructing new fire stations to reduce response times and improve coverage. These stations will ensure rapid and effective emergency response.
- 2 Hiring and Training Highly Qualified Firefighters:** Our firefighters are the backbone of our organization. We're committed to recruiting top talent and providing them with the best training possible.
- 3 Innovative Approaches to Less Acute Incidents:** We continue to explore innovative ways to handle less acute incidents, freeing up resources for more critical emergencies. Our Community Assistance, Referral, and Education team is key to this strategy, offering proactive care to those who need it.
- 4 Expansion of Our CARES Team:** Thanks to a recent grant, we're proud to announce the expansion of our Community Assistance, Referrals, and Education Services team.

Fall represents my favorite time of year. The return of the school year, the changing seasons, and the crisp we can feel in the air are comforting. Preparation is the key to enjoying these annual, seasonal changes. As winter approaches, I encourage you to prepare your homes and vehicles for the season's challenges. Winter weather can bring a range of hazards, from icy roads to power outages, and being prepared is vital to staying safe.

Thank you once again for your support of Proposition 1. It's a testament to the strong partnership between the VRFA and the communities we serve.

We provide some valuable tips in this issue you can use to prepare.

A Final Word of Thanks

In closing, thank you once again for your support of Proposition 1. It's a testament to the strong partnership between the VRFA and the communities we serve. We are honored to have your trust and will continue to work tirelessly to protect and serve you. Together, we can create the safest community to live, work, and visit.

Stay safe this winter, and remember that the VRFA is here for you, now and always.

With gratitude,

Brad Thompson

Chief, Valley Regional Fire Authority.

THE VRFA WELCOMES NEW TEAM MEMBERS



DEANA ELKINS
IT SERVICES TECHNICIAN

Deana Elkins has more than 18 years of experience working in many areas of Information Technology. She is currently working towards completing a degree in software development. Deana enjoys musical theatre and video games in her free time and plays several musical instruments, including the flute, oboe, and piccolo.

Welcome to the VRFA team, Deana!



LINDSAY NEMEYER
PEER CARE NAVIGATOR

Lindsay Nemeyer is our new Peer Care Navigator. This position is part of a five-year CDC Overdose to Action-Local grant through Public Health - Seattle & King County and in partnership with HealthPoint. Her role will be to enhance patient linkage, retention, and re-engagement in medication of opioid use disorder care and harm reduction services.

Before joining the VRFA, Lindsay was a Team Manager for the Recovery Navigator Program at Peer WA, serving individuals in King County for 3.5 years. She has a certificate as a Certified Peer Counselor.

Her work will benefit many of our community members, and we are happy to have Lindsay on board!

VRFA MEMBERS ON THE MOVE



PAUL STRONG
BATTALION CHIEF OF HEALTH, SAFETY, AND EMS

On July 16th, Battalion Chief Paul Strong transitioned from Support Services to the newly established Battalion Chief of Health, Safety, and EMS role.



STEVE ZEHNDER
BATTALION CHIEF OF THE SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION

On September 1st, Battalion Chief Steve Zehnder transferred from shift to his new role as the Battalion Chief of the Support Services Division.



SCOTT AUSTIN
CAPTAIN

Scott Austin was promoted to captain on August 4th. Austin became a member of VRFA in 2018.



JIM ALLENBAUGH
BATTALION CHIEF

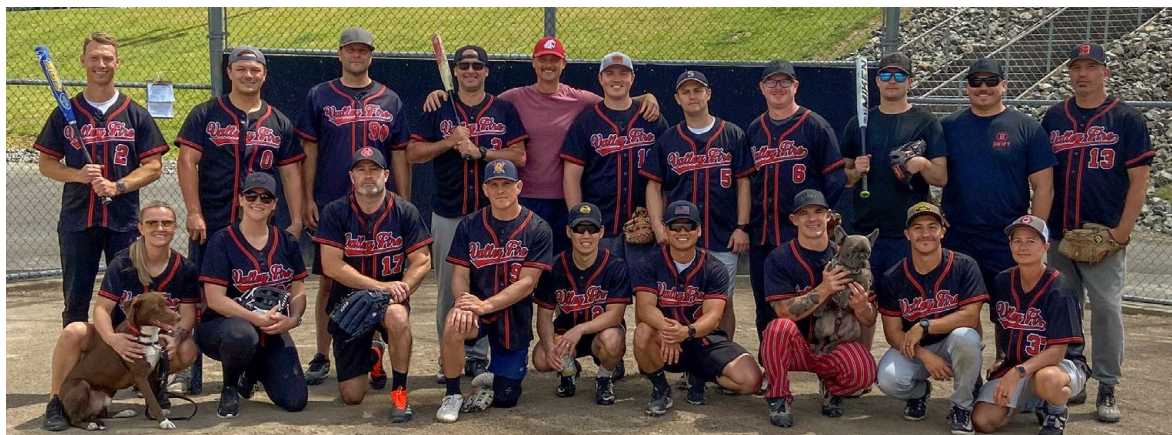
On September 1st, Jim Allenbaugh, a 16-year veteran of VRFA, was promoted to Battalion Chief.

FIRE STATION CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

Planning and design work continues for the new fire stations funded by the November 2023 ballot measures. The design for Station 36, on 30th Street Northeast between Auburn Way North and I Street Northeast, is nearly complete. We anticipate breaking ground in May 2025. Planning and design work for Station 38 on Ellingson continues as we determine the best way to orient the station on the site. Preliminary studies for the Station 31 property will also begin later this year.



THE VRFA GIVES BACK



Firefighters Raise Money for Local Charities

Some say summer is best spent outdoors. VRFA's International Association of Firefighters Local 1352 couldn't agree more. This summer, the firefighters of Local 1352 participated in several events to raise money for local charities.

Our Local 1352 Firefighters participated in two softball tournaments over the summer. The first tournament, hosted by Renton Firefighters in June, was a fundraiser for Lionhardt, a non-profit founded by VRFA Firefighter Blake Laidlaw. Lionhardt offers awareness and financial support to first responders facing critical illness or injury. After an intense day of softball lasting over 10 hours, our team secured 2nd place and contributed to raising over \$5,000 among all eight participating teams. We're grateful to Renton Fire for the invitation.

Once again, we were back in the outdoor kitchen, participating in the annual chili cook-off against the Auburn Police Department. The event was held at the Auburn Farmer's Market in mid-August. Community members and uniformed personnel could purchase a tasting ticket and vote for their favorite chili. The money raised went to the Auburn Food Bank. Although the Auburn Police Department won the Golden Bowl and the victory, the event raised over \$1,000 for the Auburn Food Bank.

"It's always cool to see how much support VRFA and Auburn receive from the community."



The second tournament was held in Olympia in July, on behalf of the Washington State Council of Firefighters' Burn Foundation. In its 51st year of operation, the tournament showcased 20 teams of first responders competing over two days. "It's great to connect and bond with co-workers outside of work in a competitive environment while also supporting the Burn Foundation," says Firefighter Mitch Cox. Although the team did not secure the championship this year, the number of VRFA members interested in joining significantly increased.

Local 1352 Chili cook-off lead Zach White commented, "It's always cool to see how much support VRFA and Auburn receive from the community."

We will look to make another run at both softball tournaments next year and up our chili game to raise even more funds and awareness for community programs.

SMOKE ALARMS

Continued from page 2.

- Develop and practice a fire escape plan with your family so everyone knows what to do when the alarm sounds.

Replacement:

If your alarm is chirping due to a low battery or some other issue, it is important to return the unit to full working order as soon as possible. Hearing a continuous chirp can lead some people to ignore the warning sounds of an alarm when there is an emergency.

- Smoke alarms with non-replaceable (long-life) batteries are designed to remain effective for up to 10 years. If the alarm chirps, warning that the battery is low, replace the entire smoke alarm right away.
- For smoke alarms without non-replaceable batteries, replace batteries at least once a year.

- Replace smoke alarms every ten years, even if they are working. Over time, the sensors can become less sensitive.

How to Choose an Alarm:

It is important to purchase a smoke alarm that has been tested by a qualified laboratory. The two most common types of smoke alarms are ionization and photoelectric alarms. Make sure your smoke alarm meets the needs of all family members, including those with sensory or physical disabilities.

To learn more about Fire Prevention Week and this year's theme, "SMOKE ALARMS, Make Them WORK for YOU!" visit www.fpw.org. Additional Fire Prevention Week resources for children, caregivers, and educators can be found at www.sparky.org and www.sparkyschoolhouse.org.



VRFA Services

The VRFA provides CPR and First Aid classes, complimentary blood pressure checks, fire station tours, custom-fit bicycle helmets, custom-fit life jackets, smoke alarms, child car seat inspections and more.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

call **253-288-5800** or go to www.vrfa.org

VRFA Administration

Brad Thompson

Fire Chief/Administrator

Rick Olson

Deputy Chief of Operations

Tim Day

Deputy Chief of Community Risk Reduction

Mark Horaski

Chief Financial Officer

Sarah Borden

Human Resources Director

Board of Governance

Nancy Backus

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Troy Linnell

Vice-Chair, City of Algona Mayor

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VRFA HEADQUARTERS

Fire Station 31
1101 D Street NE, Auburn, WA 98002
253-288-5800

Business Hours 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
www.vrfa.org



The VRFA is committed to our mission:
WE SERVE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY