

Hello everyone,

We, the fire departments in Mercer County need your help!!! We need you to please sign the petition so that we can secure our funding to keep operating. I know that many of you (the recipients of this email) have already signed the petition; however we are still a long way away from our goal of 3500 signatures. Many of you forward email that is either of interest, they are funny, or a cause that you believe is worthwhile. I am requesting that you do the same with this email. We need to raise the awareness of the need of our local volunteer fire departments. If we do not get this funding, there will be some fire departments that will either have to cut services they offer or not purchase needed equipment that could be needed to either save your life or theirs.

First let me explain the increase we are asking for. The vast majority of you will not see an increase on your fire fee. There are only 905 residences in Mercer County that will pay the \$30 fire fee on their residence. The proposed increase only affects residences OVER 2500 square feet. If your residence meets this, your fee will now be a mere \$30 a year. Business will pay a fee based on their square footage and not a flat rate like they are paying now. At the current rate, Walmart pays the same amount as the small mom and pop store does. This is not fair to the business. Most of the large business has a fire protection fee built into their budget, which would be the business that would pay the highest fee. To look at this from a firefighting standpoint, it would take more resources to just fight a fire at Walmart then at a small business; just think of the fuel costs associated with a fire. Here again, the fee would be a yearly fee and not a monthly fee. This is nothing that would affect the company's business even in this down economy.

Next I would like to take a few lines to tell you why we need this increase. In the beginning when the fire fee was established, back in 1989, the fire departments believed that they could operate pretty well with the money they received. The problem is the money coming in has not changed, but the cost of EVERYTHING in the fire service has increased drastically. A couple of examples are the Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) which is the air packs that we wear so that we can breathe in the smoke. Just in the 18 years I have been in the fire service, I have seen the cost go from around \$1,500 to \$5,000 for each air pack. This is due to increased technology as well as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) mandating changes. The packs we have now are better in many different ways but they are also extremely expensive. They also have a shelf life as well. The bottle itself is only able to be used for 15 years while the actual life of the pack will be determined by the use. Another big increase is bunker gear. Currently to outfit someone with new gear which would include a: helmet, nomex hood, coat, pants, boots, and gloves is around \$3,000 per person. This is something that EVERY firefighter must have. We can't say they "you get gear and I'm sorry but you don't" when it comes to safety. It has come to the point to where the officers of the department when working on their budget must decide where to place the safety of their members. When we purchase gear, we want the best gear available that offers the best protection. We are to the point that we end up buying gear that "just meets the standards" due to the expense. Oh and if you were wondering, the \$3,000 for the gear is not for the top of the line.

As a firefighter it is often tough to ask for assistance. After all we respond in the middle of the night, during the worst weather, and during holidays to provide help. We are the ones that everyone calls when they need help. This has been a challenge for us to get the signatures needed to "ask" the County Commission to change our fire fee. Here is how the process works. We must receive signatures from 10% of the REGISTERED voters in Mercer County. That equates to about 3,500 signatures. The problem arises with the fact that the 10% includes residences of the city of Princeton and Bluefield. The signatures we can use however cannot be from within the cities as they are not affected by this. And again you must be a registered voter for your signature to count. Right, wrong, or indifferent that's the state law. Here is my personal request: please take a minute and forward this to your friends and family. Please take the time to ask who has a signature form for you to sign. We need YOUR help on this. We as volunteer firefighters give up a lot when it comes to training and responding to calls. I personally have missed dinners, parties, and have even left my family on Christmas morning to respond to the call for help. We cannot do this alone, this is an opportunity for you to give back to your fire department. If you cannot find someone in your area who has a form, then email me at john.caseyii@gmail.com and I will either find someone for you, or send you the form so that we can count your signature.

Thank you for your time and help in this matter. If you have any questions please feel free to email me and I will be sure that you get an answer.

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Best regards,

John Casey

Training Officer
Mercer County Fire Association

Mobile: (304) 320-5509

Fax: (304) 431-4138