

## Aeneas Valley Fire District Newsletter

This is an unofficial publication intended to inform the public on items of general interest. Every effort is made to insure accuracy, but if discrepancies occur between official paperwork and this newsletter then use the official source first.

**WOW – what a year!!!:** Due to the number and details of this year’s events this newsletter will be larger than normal. For clarity numbers in parenthesis preceded by plus or minus sign will represent the difference in value from the previous year. For example “We have 40 (+7) widgets” means we have 7 more widgets than the previous year. Because of the year we had the financial and response numbers will be through the roof compared with previous years.

**2015 Year end stats:** *Personnel:* We have 32 (+9) firefighters, 4 (-2) of those being trained EMTs. *Vehicles:* Our active vehicle inventory is 12 (+1) vehicles (5 wildland engines (one being also equipped as a rescue vehicle), 3 structure engines, 3 (+1) water tenders and 1 emergency aid unit. *Responses (through Dec 25):* FD 16 made 62 responses to 56 callouts involving 218 vehicles (67 FD16 and 151 private) and 286 FD16 personnel with another 51 standing by. Types of calls were: 23 Medical, 2 structure fires, 4 vehicle accidents, 23 wildland fires, 2 Other Rescue and 1 false alarm. *NOTE: these numbers do not count the major fires and the DNR employment as we are still in the process of tallying those up. They will though add at least 99 responses to wildfire, with corresponding increases in personnel and vehicles.* Some callouts involved multiple incident types (i.e. structure and wildland fire with medical, wildland fire and other rescue etc.). *Financial:* Income for 2015 (some still pending receipt) (Jan-Nov) was \$213,400 (taxes = \$44,471, grants = \$67,703, fee for service = \$129,000, donations = \$18,150). Total spending (Jan-Dec) = \$71,882.

### ...AND NOW LET’S TALK BIG FIRES

The fire district was employed by 3 government entities during this fire season, most of it overlapping. It’s important to note that, despite it being very clear that all FD 16 personnel could evacuate the district when we went to level 3, our firefighters remained throughout the entire period to protect the district. We “deputized” an additional 15 qualified individuals to bolster our firefighting force. Also, because so much happened during this time, only a small fraction can be covered in this newsletter. Now let’s examine those employments in order of start date.

**DNR fire suppression:** June 28 – August 29 (49 days). Because of the fire conditions and the previous year’s Carlton Complex fire DNR was hiring extra resources to augment their normal fire response. We participated with one wildland engine. Our crews responded all over North Okanogan County and participated in a significant number of fires. This earned \$36,260 for our district.

For the following fires most firefighters not employed each day would generally patrol the valley and triage structures (for those structures that could be saved we would do cleanup and other things to make the structure less likely to burn).

**North Star Fire:** 18 August – 5 September (19 days). The Forest Service hired 3 of our vehicles and firefighters to set up fire lines to stop the fire from spreading into the Lyman Lake/Aeneas Valley area. Because of all the other fires going on there were maybe only 40 firefighters confronting this giant. These lines held but later spot fires occurred (from several miles away) in the Devils Canyon

area. These were attacked and luckily contained. [Had the fires not been stopped they would most likely have headed up Aeneas Valley with very little chance of being stopped quickly.](#) The North Star fire beat out the Carlton Complex fire as the largest fire in State history. When the North Star fire started its run up against the fire lines, and due to the forecasted winds, our district elevated the evacuation level to 3 (evacuate now) to get valley residents out of harms way. We immediately sent firefighters throughout the valley to alert as many residents as possible to the evacuation. Throughout the remaining days the fires made advances in other areas but, again, were brought to a standstill. This fire earned the district \$48,971, with an additional \$24,272 that will be paid out to firefighters.

**Tunk Block Fire:** 22 August – 11 September (21 days). Three of our vehicles with firefighters were hired on for this fire, which was part of the larger Okanogan Complex fire. The Washington State Patrol (Fire Marshalls office) would be in charge of the fire because lack of sufficient resources caused us to invoke State Mobilization. This triggered an inrush of firefighting resources that included help from as far away as Florida, New Zealand and Australia. The fire was predicted to enter Aeneas Valley in the Bench Creek area then begin marching down the valley. The fire had to take several runs at us before it closed in on the valley. Depending on your beliefs we were either incredibly lucky or received some divine intervention because two fires this large, burning simultaneously on both ends of the valley, should have overrun us. A weather inversion slowed the fires approach, giving crews time to construct some fire lines. Sitting down in our staging area on a Saturday night we were waiting for the fire to crest the ridge and enter our valley. The winds were out of the West, which was pushing the fire towards us, and were predicted to swing to out of the North by Midnight (when it would have been in our valley), thereby driving the fire right down the valley. For whatever reason the wind direction changed around 9PM, thereby pushing it down the ridge before it crested and keeping the bulk of it out of our valley. Some fire did cross over into the Crawfish Lake area but was stopped by the State crews. The only fire in our fire district was early on in the Peony Creek area. Fortunately it was spotted early and contained by Fire District and DNR crews. [Again, with the prevailing winds, had it not been stopped it would have marched right down Aeneas Valley.](#) The Fire District earned around \$45,268 on this fire.

**Donations and Support:** This earns a category by itself. It was amazing the amount of support we received, both by individuals and businesses. It started slowly at first but then started pouring in. Besides many local folks contributing we also had people from the coast load up vehicles (at their expense of course), drive them here and distribute them to various firefighting groups. A lot of support also came from business's such as Costco, Walmart, North 40 and others too numerous to cover here. They were showing up at our staging areas, asking what we needed, and then returning later with the items. It's impossible to list everything we received (or who donated it) but it included drinks, snacks, fruits, hygiene products, clothing, tables, chairs etc. etc... We filled up half our station with these donations. Also the Aeneas Valley Community Association began preparing hot delicious(!) dinners for us and delivering them in the field. One night a caterer from the coast prepared us a meal. It's impossible to describe how much a hot meal after a long hard day lifted our spirits. Our firefighters want all to know that we were extremely grateful and touched by this outpouring of support. We would also like to recognize the folks at the Aeneas Valley General Store for supporting our firefighters that were staging there for the North Star fire. They went above and beyond to make our time there more comfortable.

**Special Recognition:** Obviously these fires were by far the largest events ever for our fire district. Special recognition has to be given to Gene Jones, our chief, for capably stepping up and managing these events. Gene appointed Assistant Chief Shane Freese to handle the districts response to the North Star fire. Despite being new to this level of firefighting Shane really delivered. We all are extremely proud of him. Gene assumed the role of managing our portion of the Tunk Block fire while also dealing with the large amount of paperwork required for both these fires. Both put in very long hours and lots of planning to successfully conquer these challenges. Well done guys!

**...OTHER NEWSWORTHY STUFF**

**Property development update:**

We added an additional room onto our recently completed station. It will be used for storage, meetings and training. We are still waiting for an easement to install power. Hopefully that will be resolved by spring. The station is now home to a structure engine and is kept warm via a propane heater.



**SCBA Grant:** We were awarded a FEMA grant for the purchase of 12 SCBA units (Self

Contained Breathing Apparatus). It took several tries but we finally succeeded. FEMA will pay \$66,362 and the district will chip in \$3,492 (which is 5% of the cost). The summer fires delayed our

vendor selection process so we have just ordered the units. Training money is also covered in that grant and will get our volunteers both SCBA and structure firefighting certified.



**New Water Tender:** Previously we had received

a Freightliner truck tractor via a federal surplus property program. We purchased a 2650 gallon tank, pump and other gear and turned it into a first rate water tender. It is equipped with driver controlled spray bars and nozzles that can be used for road watering and fighting fires.

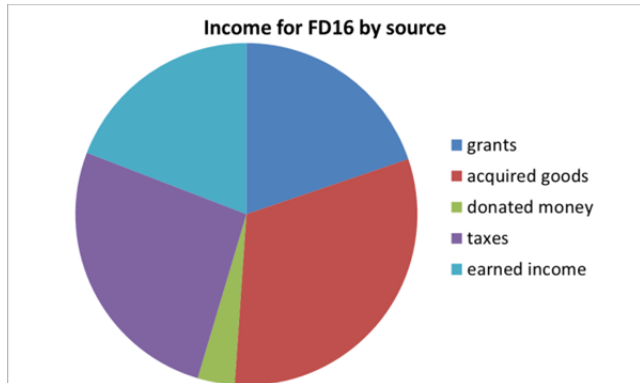


**Major Communications Upgrade:**

After multiple tries over several years we have finally received FCC approval for another radio Tactical channel and repeater installation. This will give us 2 tactical channels (to work simultaneous

incidents) and a command channel that extends our reach to both ends of the valley. We'll start tower and power installation as soon as spring thaw permits. A 40 ft. tower will be erected on leased property.

**Review of Income:** FD 16 income (money and goods) over the entire 9 year life of the district is shown in this pie chart. The “taxes” category is funded by the fire district portion of your property taxes. The other categories together represent what is attributable to the efforts of our volunteers. So while the 26% tax income is not relatively large it is very important because that allows us to work on the other income sources. For those detail oriented folks the numbers are: Grants (\$210,333 – 20%), Acquired Goods (\$333,000 – 31%), Donated Money (\$37,295 – 4%), Taxes (\$278,970 – 26%), Earned Income (\$203,666 -19%), Grand Total = \$1,063,264. The Acquired Goods are equipment we seek out and acquire through federal or state programs or from other fire agencies. The message we’re conveying is that we believe Fire District 16 delivers great value for every tax dollar collected, especially since we are 100% volunteer.



**A Wake Up Call:** This is directed at those who have not set up a defensible zone around your home and/or are counting on a garden hose to protect yourselves. Many of you also only have one road in and out. **Here are some cold hard truths you need to understand:**

- If your home is not defensible (by our standards) FD 16 will not attempt to defend it or you if you choose to stay. Our lives are more important than your house.
- Radiant heat is a killer. If you have lots of heavy fuel close to your house and it catches fire the radiant heat that is given off is tremendous. It can light objects in the house on fire through an unbroken window. You can't get even close enough to hit it with a garden hose.
- It's quite reasonable to expect that if a fire is headed your way a lot of burning embers will precede it. These are great fire starters for areas like under porches, woodpiles, open vents or windows etc.
- Generally during a large fire the power will be disrupted. Unless you are prepared for that your garden hose is really useless. And unless you have a slow creeping fire a garden hose will not protect you.
- How much water can you throw at an oncoming fire? A lot of wells in this area cannot supply sufficient water at a decent pressure for a sustained length of time.
- Had the fires got loose in this valley I suspect we would have had quite a few casualties.

The list goes on so please, really think about whether it's worth your life to try and tough it out. Death by fire is a **really, really horrible** way to die!!!! This is not the way I wanted to end a newsletter before Christmas but if it gets you motivated then it is worth it. Don't get lulled into complacency because ignoring the evacuation worked this time. Believe me – the odds we can beat this again are very slim, given similar circumstances.

This completes our twelfth newsletter. We solicit your comments and questions, which can be mailed to “Okanogan FPD 16, PO Box 645, Tonasket WA 98855-0645”. This newsletter will only be published via email, bulletin board and web site ([aeneasvalleyfire.com](http://aeneasvalleyfire.com)). A small number of paper copies are available at the monthly commissioners meetings.