

## Helpful Questions

### **Q. What is the best kind of fire extinguisher for my home?**

A multi-purpose fire extinguisher is best for the home. Look for the rating to be at least 2A10BC on the label. This extinguisher can be used on any type of fire commonly found in the home. (It will often be labeled A-B-C.) It is recommended that an extinguisher be installed in the kitchen and in the garage.

### **Q. What rating fire extinguisher is needed in a business?**

Extinguishers are required based on the type of hazard at your business. The minimum rating for an office with normal combustibles is 2A10BC.

### **Q. How many smoke detectors do I need in my home to provide adequate protection and where do I install them?**

You should have at least one smoke detector in each bedroom, the hallway, in the sleeping area, and at the top of all stairways. Smoke rises, so the best place to install a detector is on the ceiling or high on an inside wall approximately 6-8 inches below the ceiling. However, do not install a smoke detector within three feet of any device that might blow the smoke away.

### **Q. What type of smoke detector should I buy?**

A battery-operated smoke detector, available at hardware or home stores, is sufficient. Be sure to test the batteries monthly and change them once a year.

### **Q. How do I know if my smoke detector is working properly? How long do batteries last in a smoke detector?**

The fire department recommends that you test your smoke detector monthly. This is done in two ways: 1) push the test button or, 2) blow out a candle and hold the smoke up to the detector. Either method should work. Batteries normally last up to one year, and usually the smoke detector provides an audible indication (a chirp) when the batteries become weak. As a reminder, the fire department suggests you "Change your clock, Change your battery" during the fall of each year.

### **Q. How do I get a tour of the fire station?**

Tours for groups or individuals may be set up by calling the Fire Prevention Office at (760) 337-4567 during regular business hours (7 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Monday through Friday). Every effort will be made to accommodate the date and time you request.

**Q. How can I get my blood pressure checked?**

Free blood pressure checks are offered at either of the two fire stations within the city. Just go to the front office of either location and they will assist you.

**Q. How often should my business/home be inspected?**

Businesses within the city are divided into (2) different inspection programs, Company Inspection (moderate hazard) or Self-Inspection (low hazard) businesses. Inspections are conducted annually. Inspections can also be requested by calling the Fire Prevention Division at (760) 337-4567.

**Q. What size address is required on a business or residence?**

Residential requirement is a 3-inch minimum on numbers. A business needs between 6 and 8 inch numbers. Numbers must be visible from the street and of a contrasting color to the building.

**Q. How often should my fire alarm system be tested?**

Fire alarm systems in commercial properties must be tested annually by an approved and licensed company.

**Q. How often should my sprinkler or standpipe system be tested?**

Systems should be tested every five years by a licensed and approved company.

**Q. What type of extension cord can I use?**

Power strip bars are the only allowable extension cord devices, which can be used either in a business or a residence.

**Q. Can I burn something outdoors?**

The City of El Centro does not permit the open burning of any kind within the city limits.

## Questions about our non-emergency operations

**Q. How many firefighters are on duty?**

Each shift consist of one Battalion Chief; three Captains; three Engineers, and three Firefighters.

**Q. How many fire units are there each day?**

There is one fire engine, one rescue squad (if staffing permits), and one Battalion Chief at Station 1. There is one fire engine at Station 2.

**Q. Are all firefighters required to be a paramedic?**

No, the paramedic position is a special assignment. Firefighters interested in paramedic training are chosen by department seniority.

**Q. Do Paramedics also fight fire?**

Yes, paramedics perform dual functions of emergency medical and fire suppression operations.

**Q. How much water is carried on the fire engine?**

All department fire engines have a 500-gallon water tanks.

**Q. What is the difference between a Fire Truck and a Fire Engine?**

The engine carries hose and ladders and the truck carries ladders.

**Q. What are the firefighters schedules like? Do the firefighters spend the night at the fire station?**

El Centro Firefighters work a rotating 56/112 shifts, which means they are on-duty for 24 hours then off for 24 hours. This type of shift schedule requires them to stay at the fire station. Firefighters are ready to respond 24 hours per day and are often awoken each night to respond on calls. 24-hour shifts are generally the most cost-effective method of providing emergency medical services and fire suppression to the community.

**Q. How does the daily operation of the Fire Department function?**

The functions are divided into two primary areas, emergency and non-emergency. Emergency operations consist of fire alarms, medical calls, hazardous materials incidents, natural disasters, and automatic and mutual aid responses. Non-emergencies consist of fire prevention, training, maintenance, and public education activities.

**Q. What do you do when you are not fighting fires?**

Fighting fires is only a small portion of a firefighter's duties. Firefighters are responsible for the care and daily maintenance of all apparatus and equipment used in fighting fires. All equipment must be in excellent condition and ready for any type of incident. Maintenance of apparatus and equipment is vitally important to the fire service. Our apparatus,

equipment and quarters are maintained to the highest standards. This not only assures us of proper operating conditions, but it constantly familiarizes members with the technical aspects of our equipment. Firefighters participate in ongoing training sessions of an average of two hours per day to ensure they are familiar with all aspects of fire fighting techniques. These skills need to be practiced regularly as they are not used on a daily basis. Maintaining a high level of preparedness and effectiveness requires an annual training program to keep up with changes in procedures and equipment. As technology changes, so do the methods of dealing with associated problems of that technology. We are constantly trained in new methods of various types of emergency preparedness. Firefighters also conduct annual inspections of all businesses within the City to ensure they meet standards for safety.

**Q. Who cooks the meals at the station?**

Firefighters take turns doing the cooking.

**Q. Who cleans the station?**

Each firefighter has an assigned cleaning area.

**Q. Why do we see the fire engines at the market?**

Since firefighters work a 24 hour shift, they need to go to the market to get groceries for the meals they prepare at the station, and or to conduct necessary fire inspections.

**Q. Why do so many firefighters come to do the annual inspections?**

Engine and truck companies need to stay together in case they need to respond to an emergency. It permits them to respond faster when all company members are already together.

**Q. What does the Fire Department have to offer to local businesses?**

The Fire Department provides local businesses both fire and medical emergency response; assistance with Pre-Fire Planning, and evacuation planning; office safety and fire extinguisher training for employees; CPR and First Aid training; emergency preparedness planning; and annual fire inspections. In regard to environmental programs, the department is able to provide guidance on how to comply with various requirements through consultation or guidance documents. Inspections are conducted on a routine basis and are intended to reduce environmental hazards through education and engineering. The personnel are very familiar with each operation and can suggest rational and economical solutions towards compliance.

**Q. What is involved in plan check for fire prevention?**

Contractors submit building plans. We use fire protection codes and regulations to check the plans to ensure the safety of the people who will occupy the building or area. We look for things such as how people in the building can get out easily and safely without being locked in or confused. We also have certain protection systems built into the structure such as fire sprinklers and suppression systems that will work properly when they are needed.

**Q. What do you look for on a fire inspection?**

For life safety on new construction we look to see if what was shown on the plans is actually what has been installed. On an annual inspection we look for potential safety hazards that can be abated before they become a serious problem. Mutual cooperation is our main objective to get code compliance. The Department will point out a problem and try to show that it is in everyone's best interest to make the area as safe as possible.

**Q. What does the Department do to let people know how to stop fires from occurring?**

The El Centro Fire Department uses a variety of ways to educate the public about fires. They include information booths at community functions, open house at the fire station, and fire safety publications that we make available to the public. We have "Sparky" our Dalmatian dog that helps us at functions and at school to teach things like "stop, drop and roll" and "learn not to burn." We also promote smoke detector usage in the home.

**Q. Where can I read a copy of the California Fire Code?**

A copy of the California Fire Code 2001 Edition is available for review in the Fire Prevention Office at 900 S. Dogwood Rd., the city Library at 539 State St., or the City Clerks office at 1275 Main St., during office hours (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.).

## Questions about our emergency operations

### **Q. What happens when someone dials 9-1-1?**

El Centro has its own communication center (dispatch) for the fire and police departments. When you dial 9-1-1, you will speak with a dispatcher who is trained specifically for the El Centro community. The dispatcher will determine what apparatus and/or personnel need to be dispatched to handle your specific emergency.

### **Q. How is response to emergencies determined?**

Depending on the emergency situation, Police, Fire, or Police and Fire will be dispatched. Police are dispatched to situations involving robbery, assault, public nuisance, domestic disputes, and traffic collisions. Fire is dispatched to medical emergencies, fires whether actual or suspected, hazardous materials spills or releases, and traffic collisions, if injuries are suspected. Fire and Police can respond on hazardous materials incidents and traffic accidents.

### **Q. What happens when an incident gets too big?**

The City participates in Mutual or Automatic Aid Agreements with surrounding cities (Brawley, Calexico, Calipatria, Holtville, Imperial, Westmorland, Winterhaven, Yuma) In the event of a major incident, we can call on neighboring agencies for assistance. This assistance is defined through mutual or automatic aid programs and permission to respond is already granted. We, in turn, respond our units to their cities when requested.

### **Q. Does the City lose any fire protection when our units are out of town?**

A. No! On an incident where we send out our engine companies for an extended period of time, we recall Firefighters to staff the reserve fire apparatus. These members are usually in quarters within fifteen to twenty minutes.

### **Q. Tell us a little bit about your medical services.**

A. The El Centro Fire Department provides response to any medical emergency. A squad unit is on duty 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. All firefighters are trained to the Emergency Medical Technician level (EMT-1) and twelve (12) firefighters are trained Paramedics.

### **Q. Why does a fire engine always respond with the ambulance?**

A. An engine is dispatched with the Rescue unit whenever it is anticipated that additional assistance will be needed. Paramedics work as a two-person team and will have their hands full with any emergency call. The engine company personnel are part of that team and assist in setting up equipment, loading patients, and all phases of emergency medical duties.

**Q. Does the fire department charge a fee to respond to an emergency?**

A. No fee is charged for the fire department to respond to an emergency. The only fees charged are for emergency medical aids calls.

**Q. If I suspect a poison was swallowed, what phone number should I call?**

A. Call 911 first!!! You may also call the Poison Control Center after dialing 911, at 1-800-876-4766.

**Q. How do you know where a fire started?**

A. We conduct investigations for the origin and cause of every fire. Personnel are trained to conduct fire investigations in a predetermined sequence that will track the actions of people and the spread of the fire. Finding the point where a fire started is a complex process involving asking numerous questions of people such as, what did you do or see, taking lots of photographs, and recreating the scene. It is a time consuming and sometimes extremely difficult process, however, it must be done so that we can learn what happened. We can then use the information and take precautions so that the fire will not be repeated in the future.