

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



City of Duluth - Fire Department

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DATE: 3/31/2021

SUBJECT: Duluth Fire Department sees unprecedented number of structure fires in 2020

BY: Kate Van Daele, Public Information Officer

NATURE OF INCIDENT: N/A

CASE NO.:

INCIDENT DATE: 3/31/2021

INCIDENT TIME:

INCIDENT LOCATION:

Duluth Fire Department sees unprecedented number of structure fires in 2020

[Duluth, MN] The Duluth Fire Department responded to a total of 141 structure fires in 2020. This was an increase of 51 structure fires in comparison to 2019. The Department had not had more than 100 structure fires in a year since 2015 when there were 147. Since the year 2000, the highest number of structure fire calls was 183 in 2009. In the last five years, the most significant increase of structure fires was by 16 in 2018. In 2017, the total number of structure fires decreased by 23 from the year before.

“We saw a big uptick in kitchen fires which we relate to a lot of people being home due to COVID-19,” Chief Shawn Krizaj said. “It is really easy to walk away from cooking for a distraction, but this is the number one reason why fires get started in the kitchen.”

In 2018 and 2019, the Department saw an increase in medical calls. In 2020 however, the Department had its first decrease in medical calls since 2017. Crews responded to 433 fewer medical calls than in 2019 when they responded to 5,489, respectively.

“In talking with our medical partners, this data is consistent with medical providers' analysis of people avoiding coming in for medical care until it is an emergency,” Chief Krizaj said. “We heard firsthand from patients that they did not want to go to the hospital because of the risk of getting COVID-19.”

Calls for water emergencies decreased by three incidents from 2019. Water emergency response calls for the second year in a row were in the mid-twenties, with 25 calls for service in 2020 and 28 reports in 2019.

“As we have seen during the pandemic, people like to be outside,” said Deputy Chief Scott Kleive. “Duluth is fortunate to have a lot of trails and water for people to enjoy. What is shifting is the number of people who we see enjoying being on the water for different recreational purposes all year long instead of in the summer months.”

While life within the fire stations was very different during the pandemic, the Department found ways to keep morale up and continue to support the community. The Department honored requests for drive-by appearances at birthday parties, graduations, anniversaries, and other celebrations all year long.

“Getting to go to a birthday party or other celebration was great,” Captain Brian Black said. “The smiles on the faces that we saw throughout the year really helped improve morale within the Department. While we were there to support the community, it was the community who in turn was supporting us.”

“For COVID-19 precautions, our crews who normally work together, eat together and live together while on shift had to separate while in the fire station,” Chief Krizaj said. “While these precautions served us well in keeping the number of positive cases down, it was hard on our staff to not interact the way that we normally do. Our crews serve as a second family for our staff, and that was the most challenging part of the pandemic.”

While fire stations remain closed to the public, the Department is hopeful to open its doors again in 2021.

“We hope to open up our fire stations for public tours, public events, car seat demonstrations, and more sometime this year,” Chief Krizaj said. “A big part of what we do is to provide education and inform the public of how they can prevent fires and stay safe. We have done a lot of educational videos but are all looking forward to providing this service in-person again soon.”

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