

Prince George's County Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics Association
International Association of Fire Fighters: Local 1619
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For Immediate Release

STAFFING SHORTAGES CONTINUE TO IMPAIR FIRE/EMS DEPARTMENT

Just before 2:00 PM, Thursday, December 24, 2009, Firefighters and Paramedics from the Suitland area were alerted to an apartment fire. Firefighters from the Morningside Fire/EMS Station were the first to arrive at 6388 Maxwell Drive in Suitland and encountered a 3-story garden style apartment building with fire showing from the second floor. The fire extended through the top floor and eventually through the roof of the original apartment building and then extended into an adjacent building.

More than half of the units, two engines and two ladder trucks, responding on the original alarm were understaffed with only two firefighters on each rig. When a Second Alarm was requested to supplement understaffed units, incident commanders faced even more staffing challenges. One engine company failed to respond and all of the four remaining engine companies and one ladder company on the second alarm were understaffed with two personnel as well.

Ultimately, a fourth alarm equivalent was required, nearly half of the Fire and EMS Department's resources, to control an incident that may have been contained much earlier if units were properly staffed. As a result of this incident, approximately forty people were displaced on Christmas Eve. The cause of the fire remains under investigation and fire loss is estimated at \$1 million.

The Department's staffing shortages continued to cause problems into the weekend. On Saturday, December 26, 2009, at about 5:45 PM, Fire/EMS units responded to 538 Wilson Bridge Drive, a 3-story garden style apartment building in Oxon Hill, and arrived to find heavy fire on the second floor extending to the top floor and roof.

The first arriving engine company, the fourth due engine company, and the second due ladder company were all understaffed with two personnel on this incident. The fire extended through the upper floor and roof of 538 Wilson Bridge Drive then extended into an attached apartment building at 540 Wilson Bridge Drive. A Second Alarm was sounded bringing additional firefighters and paramedics to the scene. Unfortunately, several Second Alarm units were

again understaffed with two personnel on each rig. Ultimately, fully staffed units from Arlington and Alexandria were brought in to assist with providing the total staffing that was required to mitigate this emergency. As a result of this incident, 56 adults and 11 children were displaced. The cause of the fire remains under investigation and fire loss is estimated at \$1.5 million.

Staffing levels within the Department remain well below those prescribed by National Fire Protection Association guidelines. To make matters worse, the County has not hired any new Fire and EMS employees in nearly two years. Although a class of 38 recruits are expected to begin a sixth month training academy in February, this number does not even match the number retirements that have occurred in the last two months,

The Prince George's County Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics Association, the labor organization representing all paid County paid fire fighters and paramedics, is extremely concerned with the adverse impact that staffing reductions have on the citizens of the County and our members. There is no temporary solution to this problem. Our elected officials must make fire safety and fire department staffing a priority. This will require a commitment from our communities to ensure that the Fire and EMS Department has the resources and personnel that are needed to keep Prince George's County safe.

**Please help us help you! Contact your elected officials and say:
"FULLY FUND AND STAFF OUR FIRE & EMS DEPARTMENT"**

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