



**RESEARCH**

# **U.S. Fire Department Profile – 2015**

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## **Abstract**

NFPA estimates there were approximately 1,160,450 firefighters in the U.S. in 2015. An estimated 345,600 (30%) of these were career firefighters and 814,850 (70%) were volunteer firefighters. Most of the career firefighters (71%) worked in communities that protected 25,000 or more people. Most of the volunteer firefighters (95%) were in departments that protected fewer than 25,000 people. There are an estimated 29,727 fire departments in the U.S. Of these, 2,651 departments were staffed by all career firefighters, 1,893 were mostly career, 5,421 were mostly volunteer and 19,762 were all volunteer. In the U.S., 13,500 (45.4%) of departments provided EMS service, 4,617 departments (15.5%) provided EMS service and advanced life support, and 11,610 (39.1%) of departments provided no EMS support.

Keywords: fire departments, firefighters, career, volunteer, EMS, fire stations, pumpers, aerial apparatus.

## **Acknowledgments**

The authors would like to thank the fire departments who participated in this annual NFPA Fire Experience Survey, and/or the NFPA Fire Service Survey.

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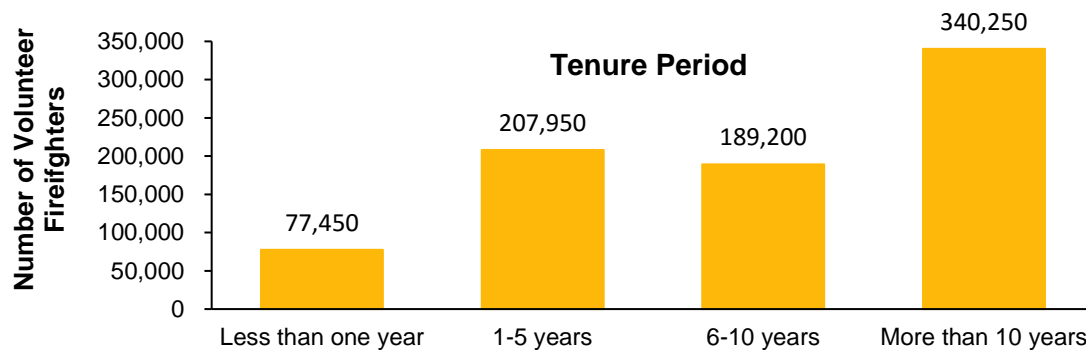
## **Overview of 2015 U.S. Fire Department Profile**

- There were 1,160,450 career and volunteer firefighters in the United States in 2015.
- The 345,600 career firefighters in 2015 represented a decrease of 0.2% from the previous year.
- 814,850 volunteer firefighters in 2015, an increase of 3.4% from the previous year.
- Since 1986, there has been a fairly steady increase in the number of career and volunteer firefighters. The number of career firefighters per 1,000 population is constant during this period, however the number of volunteer firefighters per 1,000 population is decreasing, although there was an uptick in 2015
- In 2015, 85,100, or 7.3%, of the firefighters were female. Of the career firefighters 12,850 (3.7%) were female firefighters. There were 72,250 volunteer firefighters who were female, 8.9% of the total.
- 50.7% of firefighters are between 30 and 49 years old.
- 41.8% of volunteer firefighters have 10 or more years of active service (tenure period).
- There were 29,727 fire departments in the United States in 2015. Of these, 15.3% were all or mostly career departments and protected 64.9% of the U.S. population.
- Nationwide 39.1% of fire departments provided no emergency medical services, 45.4% provided basic life support (BLS) and 15.5% provided advanced life support (ALS).
- From 1980 to 2014, local fire protection service expenditures (adjusted for inflation in 2015 dollars) increased 170%.

# The U.S. Fire Department Profile through 2015 Fact Sheet

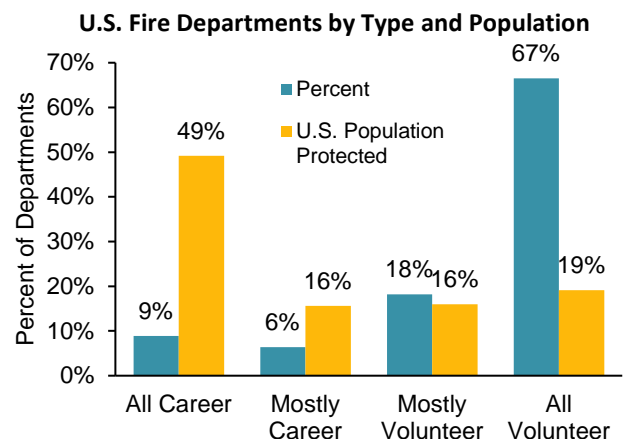
There were **1,160,450** local firefighters in the United States in 2015.

- **30%** (345,600) were career firefighters.
- **70%** (814,850) were volunteer firefighters.
- Firefighters in smaller (less than 25,000 population) communities are more likely to be volunteers.
- Departments protecting larger communities tend to have a higher proportion of firefighters in the age groups 30-39 and 40-49 than smaller communities.
- 42% of volunteer firefighters have served at least 10 years.

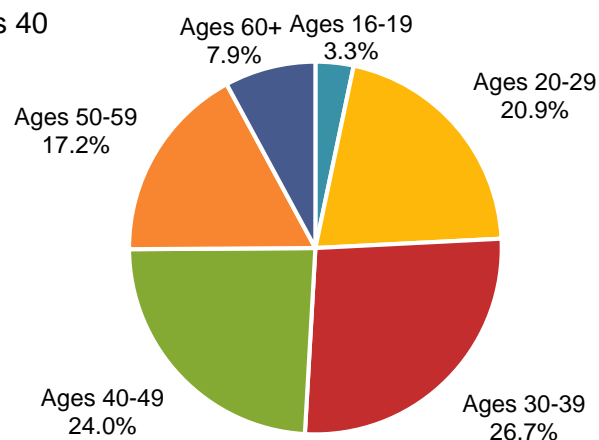


**29,727** fire departments protected the United States in 2015.

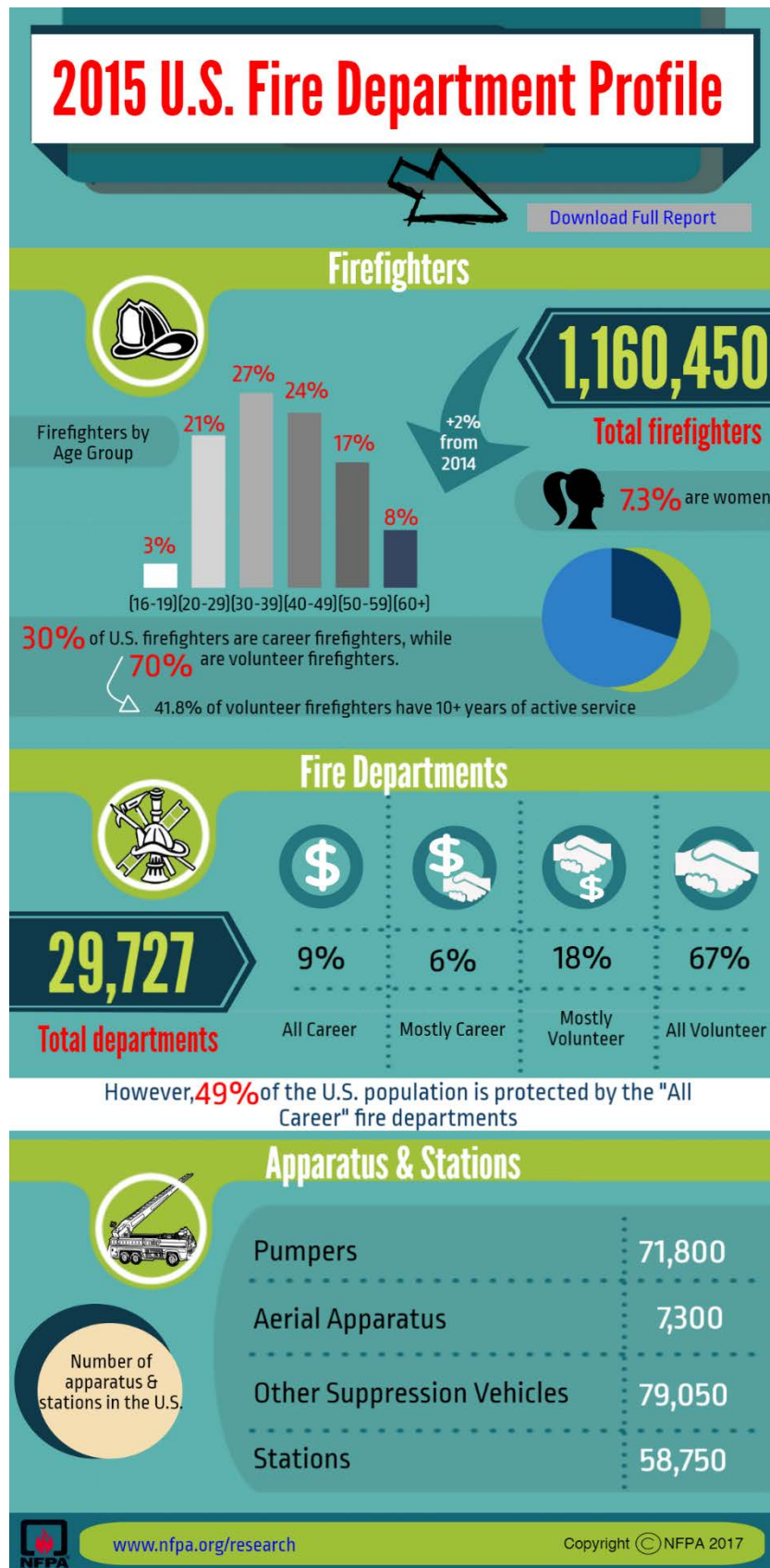
- All Career 2,651
- Mostly career 1,893
- Mostly Volunteer 5,421
- All Volunteer 19,762



**Half** the fire service is 40 or more years old.



## 2015 U.S. Fire Department Profile Infographic





## Background and Objectives

This report provides an overview of local and municipal fire departments in the United States. The analysis includes firefighters, fire departments, apparatus and stations. The results are based on data collected during the NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience (2015) and the NFPA Fire Service Survey where the data was collected over the period 2013-2015. An earlier report, [\*Fire Loss in the United States during 2015\*](#), measured the national fire experience in terms of the number of fires that fire departments responded to and the resulting civilian deaths, civilian injuries, and property losses that occurred.

This year's report includes among its results:

- An estimate of the total number of firefighters (including career, volunteer, gender).
- Trends in the number of career and volunteer firefighters and rates.
- An estimate of the number of fire departments.
- Median rates of firefighters per 1,000 population by U.S. region.
- Number of firefighters by age group and community size.
- Number of volunteer firefighters by tenure period and community size.
- Number of fire departments (including career and volunteer).
- Average apparatus and station rates.
- Departments providing emergency medical services by community size.
- Direct expenditures on local fire protection.

## Methods

The report is based on two data sources: the annual NFPA Survey for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015, and the NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2013-2015.

The U.S. Fire Experience Survey utilizes a sample of fire departments in the United States to make national projections of the fire problem. The sample is stratified by the size of the community protected by the fire department. All U.S. fire departments that protect communities with a population of more than 2,500 are included in the sample. The 13,565 departments in the nine highest strata protect a population of 300,304,722 or 93% of the U.S. population as of July, 2015.

The remainder of the sample included 8,562 randomly selected departments from stratum 10 (less than 2,500 population protected), for a total sample size of 22,127 (74%) of all known fire departments to the NFPA in the United States.

A total of 2,605 departments responded to the 2015 fire experience survey. The national projections are made by weighting sample results according to the proportion of total U.S. population accounted for by communities of each size. Around any estimate based on a sample survey, there is a confidence interval that measures the statistical certainty (or uncertainty) of the estimate. We are confident the actual number of total firefighters falls within five percent of the estimate.

The NFPA Fire Service Survey is a three year cycle survey which attempts to survey about one-third of the states in the country each year. The survey includes questions on the number of career firefighters, the number of volunteer firefighters, length of work week, number of apparatus and stations, etc. In recent years, the survey has had a response rate of between 13-16% from departments.

The results in this report are based on local and municipal fire departments. State and federal firefighting entities were not included in this sample. No adjustments were made for private fire brigades, such as industrial or military installations.

## Firefighters

There were approximately 1,160,450 firefighters in the U.S. in 2015, according to estimates based on NFPA's 2015 National Fire Experience Survey ([Table 1](#)). This is an increase of 2.3% from 2014 ([Table 2](#)).

Career firefighters include full-time uniformed firefighters regardless of assignments, e.g., suppression, prevention/inspection, administrative. For the purpose of this survey, career firefighters include only firefighters in public fire departments that protect people, their residences, and public buildings; they do not include firefighters working in private fire brigades, or for state and federal agencies.

Volunteer firefighters include any active part-time (call or volunteer) firefighters. Active volunteers are defined as being involved in firefighting. Of the total number of firefighters, 345,600 (30%) were career firefighters, while 814,850 (70%) were volunteers.<sup>1</sup>

Most career firefighters (71%) are in communities that protect 25,000 or more people. Most volunteer firefighters (95%) are in departments that protect fewer than 25,000 people. Approximately half of the volunteer firefighters are with small, rural departments that protect fewer than 2,500 people ([Table 1](#)).

Since 1986, the number of career firefighters in the U.S. has increased steadily from 237,750 in 1986 to 354,600 in 2013, an increase of 49% ([Table 2](#), [Figure 1](#)). In 2015 the number of career firefighters dropped from the high of 2013 to 345,600, a decrease of 2.5%. The rates of career firefighters per 1,000 people protected for mostly or all career departments have remained in a range of 1.54 to 1.76 career firefighters per 1,000 people protected ([Table 2](#), [Figure 1](#)) during this period. Even though the number of career firefighters has increased overtime, the number of people protected by career firefighters has remained relatively level as the population in the U.S. has increased.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that these results are based on a sample survey, and as a result there is a 95% confidence interval associated with each estimate. Based on the data reported by the fire departments responding to the 2015 National Fire Experience Survey, the NFPA is confident that the actual number of career firefighters falls between 340,500 and 350,700; and the actual number of volunteer firefighters falls between 804,500 and 825,200.

**Table 1.**  
Career and Volunteer Firefighters by Gender in the U.S. by Population Protected, 2015.

Population Protected	Career			Volunteer			Total
	Male	Female	Sub-Total	Male	Female	Sub-Total	
1,000,000 or more	38,150	1,100	39,250	1,050	200	1,250	40,500
500,000 to 999,999	33,400	2,150	35,550	4,750	500	5,250	40,800
250,000 to 499,999	25,150	1,200	26,350	1,950	50	2,000	28,350
100,000 to 249,999	49,400	1,850	51,250	1,850	200	2,050	53,300
50,000 to 99,999	41,200	1,150	42,350	6,500	550	7,050	49,400
25,000 to 49,999	50,650	1,200	51,850	18,400	1,500	19,900	71,750
10,000 to 24,999	50,900	1,450	52,350	65,000	4,900	69,900	122,250
5,000 to 9,999	21,500	1,200	22,700	95,450	7,250	102,700	125,400
2,500 to 4,999	11,600	900	12,500	182,150	18,050	200,200	212,700
Under 2,500	10,800	650	11,450	365,500	39,050	404,550	416,000
	332,750	12,850	345,600	742,600	72,250	814,850	1,160,450

Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.

Note the number of volunteer firefighters for communities of 25,000 or more and the number of career firefighters for communities of less than 10,000 may change considerably from year to year because of their small size and sample variability.

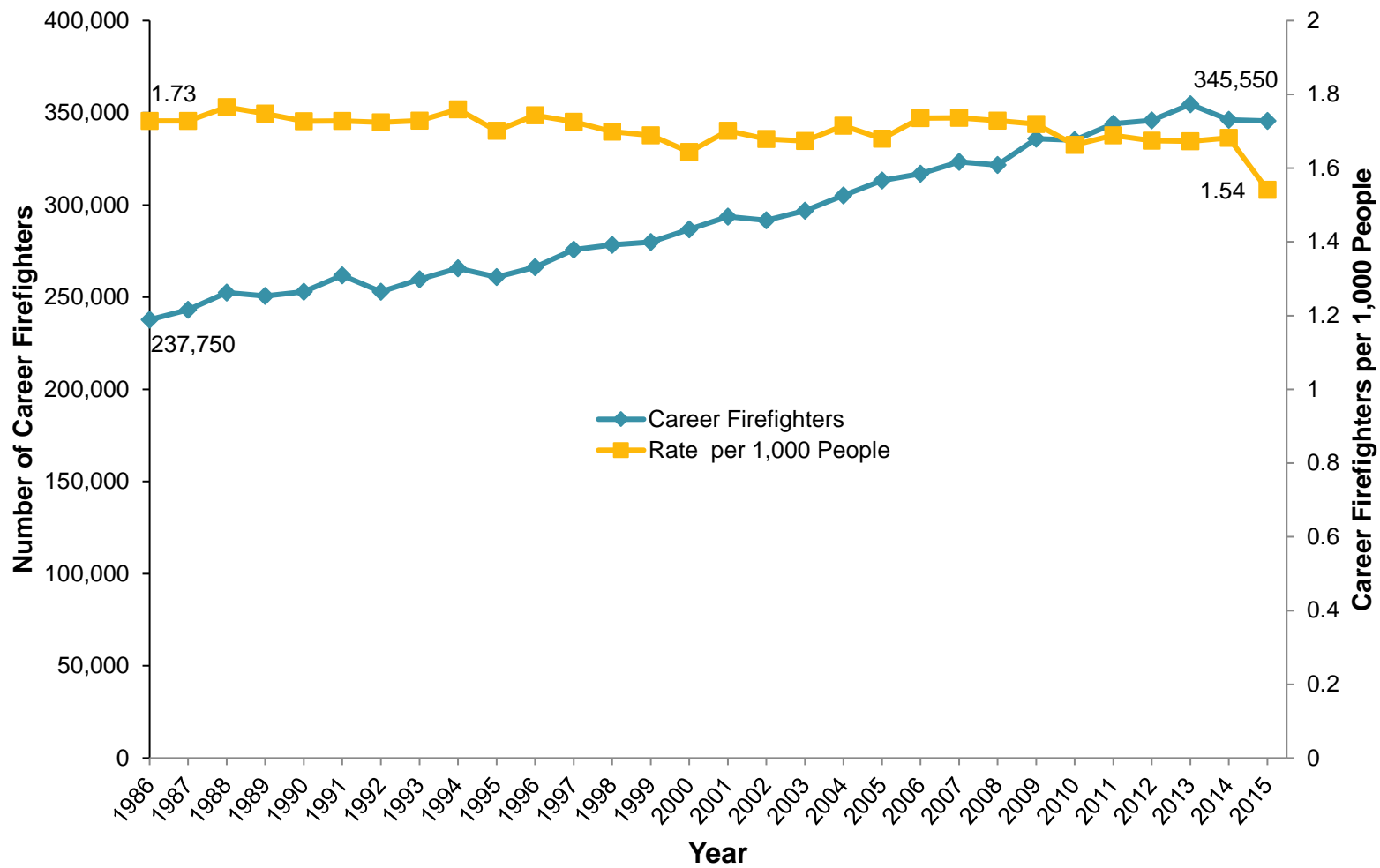
Population protected is based on resident population and not the daytime and seasonal.

See [Appendix 3](#) for Bureau of Labor Statistics on career firefighters (2011-2015).

**Table 2.**  
Number of Firefighters in the U.S., 1986-2015.

Year	Aggregate		Career		Volunteer	
	Number	Rate per 1,000 Population	Number	Rate per 1,000 Population	Number	Rate per 1,000 Population
1986	1,045,950	1.48	237,750	1.73	808,200	7.88
1987	1,060,000	2.57	243,200	1.73	816,800	8.05
1988	1,040,750	2.22	252,500	1.77	788,250	7.77
1989	1,020,700	3.05	250,600	1.75	770,100	7.45
1990	1,025,650	3.19	253,000	1.73	772,650	7.56
1991	1,033,600	6.22	261,800	1.73	771,800	7.61
1992	1,058,300	3.94	253,000	1.72	805,300	7.34
1993	1,055,050	4.09	259,650	1.73	795,400	7.25
1994	1,073,600	4.12	265,700	1.76	807,900	7.19
1995	1,098,850	4.18	260,850	1.70	838,000	7.42
1996	1,081,800	4.07	266,300	1.74	815,500	6.98
1997	1,079,050	4.03	275,700	1.73	803,350	7.12
1998	1,082,500	4.00	278,300	1.70	804,200	7.18
1999	1,065,150	3.90	279,900	1.69	785,250	6.93
2000	1,064,150	3.86	286,800	1.64	777,350	7.25
2001	1,078,300	3.85	293,600	1.70	784,700	7.04
2002	1,108,250	3.89	291,650	1.68	816,600	7.12
2003	1,096,900	3.77	296,850	1.67	800,050	7.05
2004	1,100,750	3.76	305,150	1.71	795,600	6.88
2005	1,136,650	3.82	313,300	1.68	823,650	7.30
2006	1,140,900	3.81	316,950	1.74	823,950	7.26
2007	1,148,000	3.81	323,350	1.74	825,450	7.29
2008	1,148,850	3.81	321,700	1.73	827,150	7.01
2009	1,148,100	3.81	335,950	1.72	812,150	7.27
2010	1,103,300	3.57	335,150	1.66	768,150	6.59
2011	1,100,450	3.54	344,050	1.69	756,400	6.37
2012	1,129,250	3.60	345,950	1.67	783,300	6.60
2013	1,140,750	3.60	354,600	1.67	786,150	6.68
2014	1,134,400	3.56	346,150	1.68	788,250	6.43
2015	1,160,450	3.36	345,600	1.54	814,850	6.71

Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience (1986-2015).



**Figure 1:** Number of Career Firefighters and Rate per 1,000 Population.

Source: NFPA Annual Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience (1986-2015).

The number of volunteer firefighters declined in the late 1980s and late 1990's, each time returning to the same level soon after. From 2005-2009, the number of volunteer firefighters was stable at a level slightly higher than any previously recorded other than in 1995. (Table 2, Figure 2). After a dip in 2010-2011, in 2012-2015, the number of volunteers appeared to increase and was in the range of 783,300 to 814,850, an increase of 4.0% over this period. When the rates of volunteer firefighters per 1,000 people protected for mostly or all volunteer departments are examined, the rates show a downward trend and range from a high of 8.05 in 1987 to a low of 6.37 in 2011 per 1,000 population protected. In 2015 the rate increased to 6.71 per 1,000 population protected.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics for the 2011-2015 periods (Appendix 3), there were on average 27,450 (9.2%) Hispanic or Latino career firefighters; 24,350 (8.1%) African-American career firefighters; 2,500 (0.8%) Asian career firefighters and 13,750 (4.6%) female career firefighters.<sup>2</sup> NFPA estimates that in 2015, there were 12,850 female career firefighters and 72,250 female volunteer firefighters employed by local fire departments.<sup>3</sup>

A good way to develop a sense of the size of departments relative to the population they protect is to examine the rate of firefighters per 1,000 population. Table 3 and Table 4 provide the range of rates for career firefighters in departments protecting at least 10,000 people and for volunteer firefighters in departments protecting a population less than 25,000 people. **It is important to note that the rates are based on data reported to the NFPA and do not reflect recommended rates or some defined fire protection standard.**

Fire departments protecting communities of 10,000 people or more had median rates of 0.14 to 1.30 career firefighters per 1,000 people (Table 3). However, ranges for departments varied

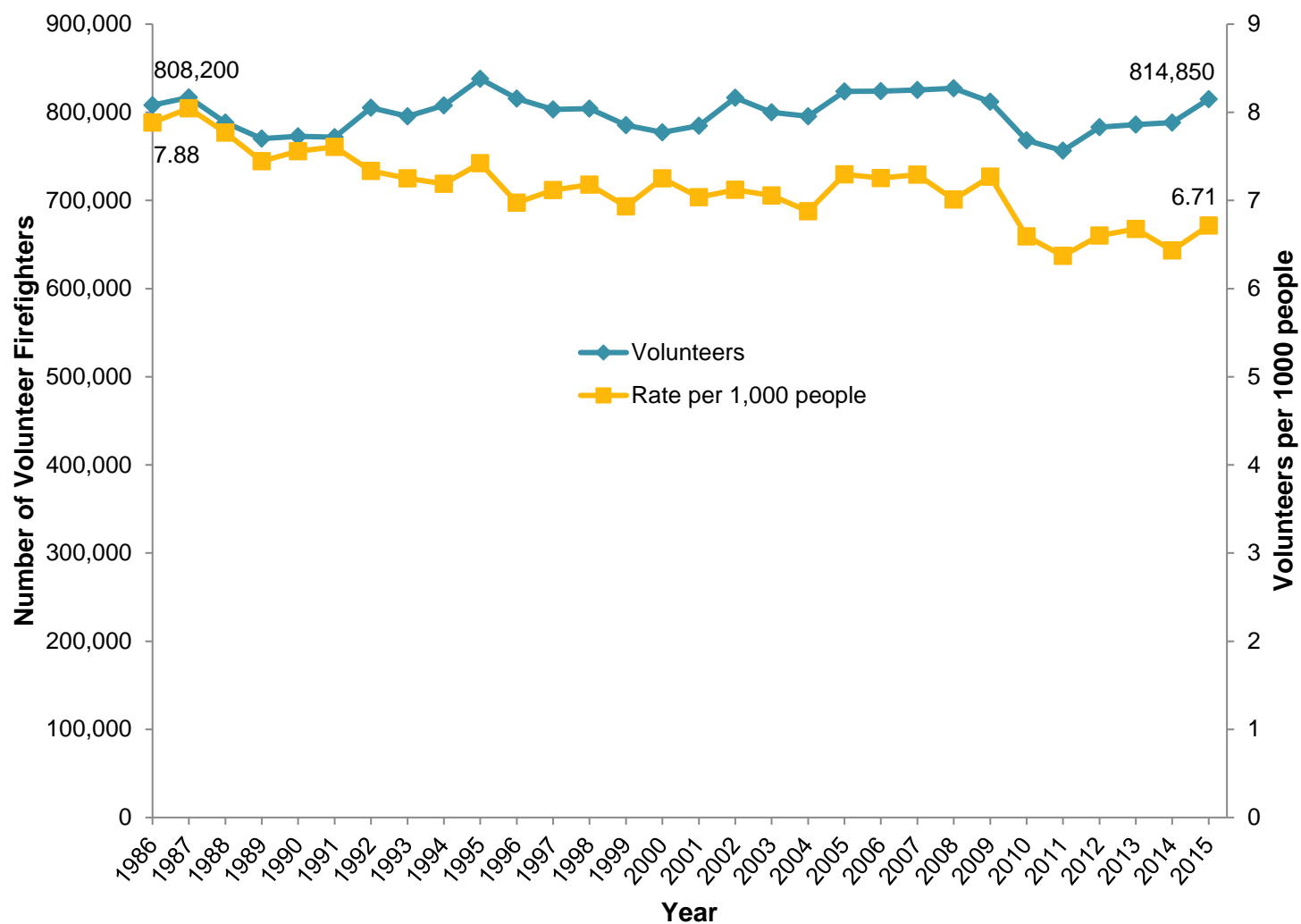
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<sup>2</sup> Figures are from the *Annual Averages Tables Employment and Earnings* (2011-2015) Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington D.C. These numbers can change considerably from year to year because of their small size and sample variability.

<sup>3</sup> Note that these results are based on a sample survey, and as a result there is a 95% confidence interval associated with each estimate. Based on the data reported by the fire departments responding to the 2015 National Fire Experience Survey, the NFPA is confident that the actual number of female career firefighters falls between 12,300 and 12,850; and the actual number of female volunteer firefighters falls between 70,500 and 74,000.

considerably with community size and particularly for communities protecting fewer than 10,000 people. Note that the rates for a particular size of community varied considerably. Departments face great variation in their specific circumstances and policies, including length of work week, unusual hazards, geographical dispersion of the community, and scope of services provided (e.g., whether the department handles emergency medical calls).





**Figure 2:** Number of Career Firefighters and the Rate per 1,000 Population.

Source: NFPA Annual Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience (1986-2015).

**Table 3.**  
Career Firefighter Rates by Population Protected, 2015.

Career Firefighters Per 1,000 Population			
Population Protected	Low	Median	High
1,000,000 or more	0.58	1.12	1.48
500,000 to 999,999	0.52	1.21	2.57
250,000 to 499,999	0.47	1.28	2.22
100,000 to 249,999	0.18	1.24	3.05
50,000 to 99,999	0.00	1.30	3.19
25,000 to 49,999	0.00	1.00	6.22
10,000 to 24,999	0.00	0.14	3.94

Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.

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**The rates listed above are based on data reported to the NFPA, and do not reflect recommended rates or some defined fire protection standard.**

The rates of a particular size of community may vary widely because departments face great variation in their specific circumstances and policies including length of work week, unusual structural conditions, types of service provided to the community, geographical dispersion of the community, and other factors.

Career rates are shown only for communities with populations of 25,000 or more, where departments are comprised of all career or mostly career firefighters. Also some of these departments have some volunteers, who are not reflected in these figures.

The low and high values are the lowest and highest values by size of community. The median value is chosen so that half the departments had higher values, and half had lower.

Fire departments protecting less than 25,000 people had median rates of volunteer firefighters per 1,000 persons in the range of 1.25 to 20.00 ([Table 4](#)). This wide range in median rates for smaller communities reflects the minimum number of firefighters needed to staff a department regardless of community size. Volunteer firefighters are often available on a part-time basis only; it may take more volunteers to ensure an adequate response to each alarm. The median rate for volunteer firefighters increases as population protected decreases.

Length of work week and its effect on rate of career firefighters per 1,000 population by size of community is provided in [Table 5](#). [Table 6](#) and [Table 7](#) provide median rates for career and volunteer firefighters by region and size of community.

Of the 1,160,450 firefighters, the age group accounting for the largest share of firefighters was the 30-39 group, 26.7% of all firefighters ([Table 8](#) and [Figure 3](#)). Many firefighters fell in the 40-49 age group (24.0%) and the next largest was the 20-29 age group (20.9%). Firefighters, age 50-59 accounted for a smaller share (17.2%), but still more than one-sixth of all firefighters. Few firefighters fell outside this combined range of 20 to 59 years old. Only 3.3% of firefighters were age 16 to 19, and another 7.9% were age 60 and over.

Age group patterns did vary somewhat by population of community protected ([Table 9](#)). Departments that protect less than 25,000 people and comprised mostly of volunteers tended to have higher proportions of firefighters in the under 30 age group, while departments that protect 25,000 people or more and are comprised mostly of career firefighters had higher proportions of firefighters in the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups. Departments protecting less than 2,500 people had the highest percentage of firefighters age 50 and older (30.8%).

When age group patterns by year are examined for the 1998-2015 period, there were slight changes over time ([Figure 4](#)). The 30-39 and the 40-49 age groups showed slight decreases over the period, while the 50-59 and 60 and over groups showed moderate increases over the period. Volunteer firefighter tenure periods show that more than two of every five (41.8%) volunteers have more than 10 years of active service. Almost two-thirds (65%) of volunteer firefighters have more than 5 years of active service ([Table 10](#)).

**Table 4.**  
Volunteer Firefighter Rates by Population Protected, 2015.

Population Protected	Volunteer Firefighters Per 1,000 Population		
	Low	Median	High
10,000 to 24,999	0.00	1.25	14.58
5,000 to 9,999	0.00	3.69	14.33
2,500 to 4,999	0.00	6.84	21.20
Under 2,500	0.00	20.00	*

Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.

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**The rates listed above are based on data reported to the NFPA, and do not reflect recommended rates or some defined fire protection standard.**

The rates of a particular size of community may vary widely because departments face great variation in their specific circumstances and policies including structural conditions, types of service provided to the community, geographic dispersion of the community, and other factors.

Volunteer rates are shown only for communities under 25,000, where departments are comprised of all volunteer or mostly volunteers. Also, some of these departments, particularly those with population protected of 5,000 or more, have some career firefighters, who are not reflected in these figures.

The low and high values are the lowest and the highest values by size of community. The median value is chosen so that half of the departments had higher values, and half had lower.

\*Because there are a minimum number of firefighters to form even a single company, smaller communities of under 100 people can have very high rates.

**Table 5.**  
Career Firefighters per 1,000 People for all Career Departments by  
Work Week and Population Protected 2013-2015.

Population Protected	40-45 Hour	46-51 Hour	52-60 Hour
1,000,000 or more	*	1.40	0.99
500,000 to 999,999	2.40	1.89	1.27
250,000 to 499,999	1.85	1.91	1.17
100,000 to 249,999	1.91	1.54	1.42
50,000 to 99,999	2.03	1.57	1.60
25,000 to 49,999	1.92	1.57	1.31

Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2013-2015.

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**The rates listed above are based on data reported to the NFPA, and do not reflect recommended rates or some defined fire protection standard.**

The rates of a particular size of community may vary widely because departments face great variation in their specific circumstances and policies including structural conditions, type of service provided to the community, geographic dispersion of the community and other factors.

Career rates are shown only for communities over 25,000, where departments are comprised mostly of career firefighters.

\*Insufficient data.

**Table 6.**  
Median Rates of Career Firefighters per 1,000 People by Region  
and Population Protected, 2015.

Population Protected	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
250,000 to 499,999	2.19	1.31	1.28	0.88
100,000 to 249,000	2.15	1.30	1.44	0.90
50,000 to 99,999	1.76	1.13	1.49	0.99
25,000 to 49,999	1.88	1.16	1.64	0.96

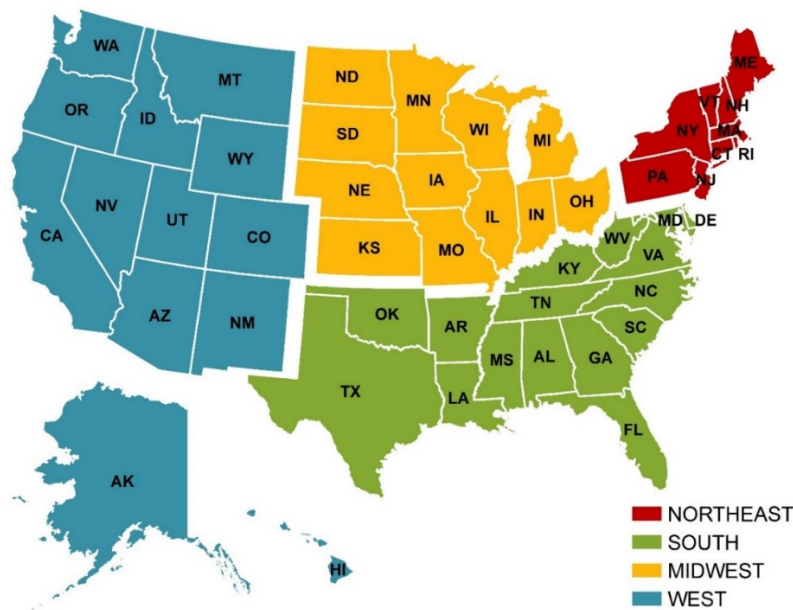
Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.

**The rates listed above are based on data reported to the NFPA, and do not reflect recommended rates or some defined fire protection standard.**

The rates of a particular size of community may vary widely because departments face great variation in their specific circumstances and policies including structures conditions, types of service provided to the community, geographic dispersion of the community, and other factors.

Career rates are shown only for communities over 25,000, where departments are comprised mostly of career firefighters.

As defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the four regions are:



**Table 7.**  
Median Rates of Volunteer Firefighters per 1,000 People by Region  
and Population Protected, 2015.

Population Protected	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
10,000 to 24,999	1.73	1.46	0.85	1.01
5,000 to 9,999	4.17	3.82	2.78	3.53
2,500 to 4,999	8.16	6.83	6.39	6.05
Under 2,500	17.54	24.07	16.67	26.29

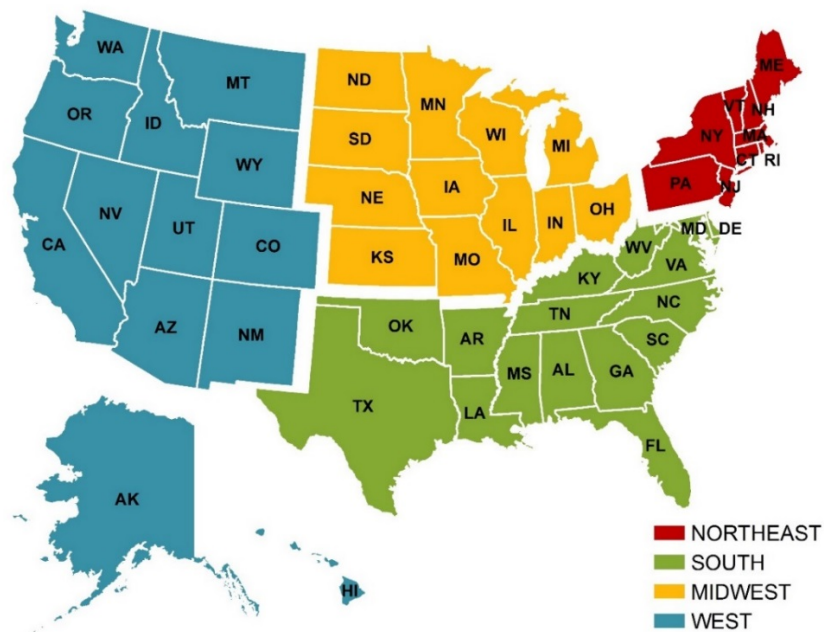
Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.

**The rates listed above are based on data reported to the NFPA, and do not reflect recommended rates or some defined fire protection standard.**

The rates of a particular size of community department may vary widely because departments face great variation in their specific circumstances and policies including structural conditions, types of service provided to the community, geographic dispersion of the community, and other factors.

Volunteer rates are shown only for communities under 25,000, where departments are comprised of mostly volunteer

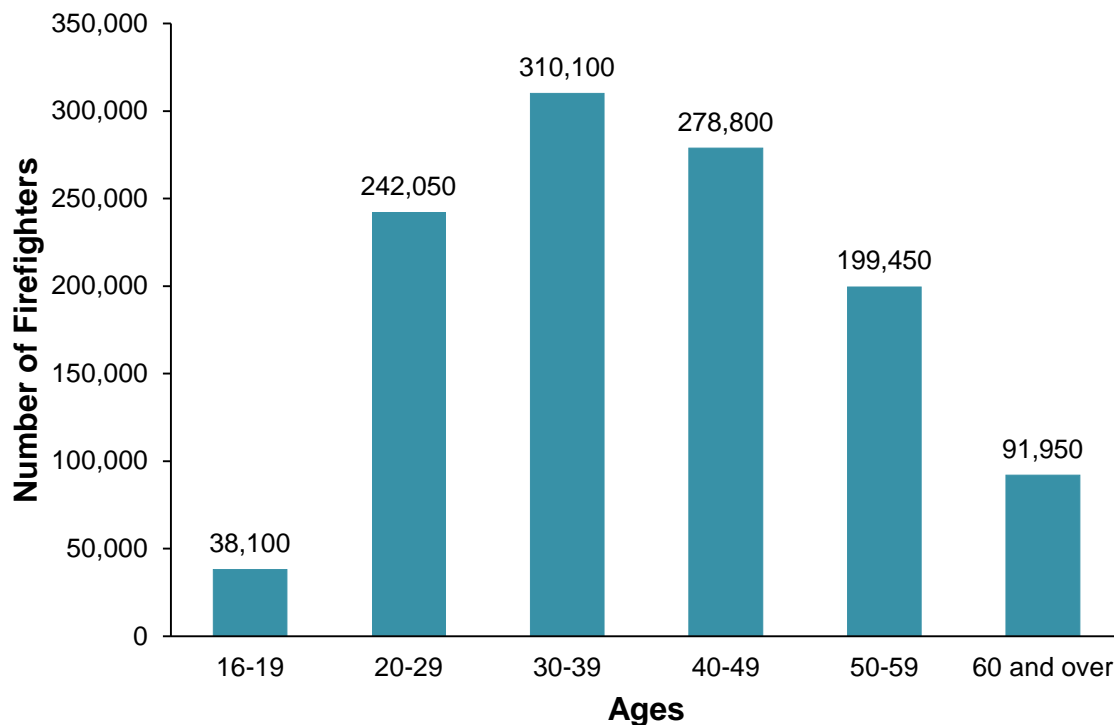
As defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the four regions are:



**Table 8.**  
Number of Firefighters in the U.S. by Age Group, 2015.

Firefighters		
Age	Number	Percent
16-19	38,100	3.3%
20-29	242,050	20.9%
30-39	310,100	26.7%
40-49	278,800	24.0%
50-59	199,450	17.2%
60 and over	91,950	7.9%
Total	1,160,450	100.0%

Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.



**Figure 3.** Number of Firefighters in the U.S. By Age Group, 2015.

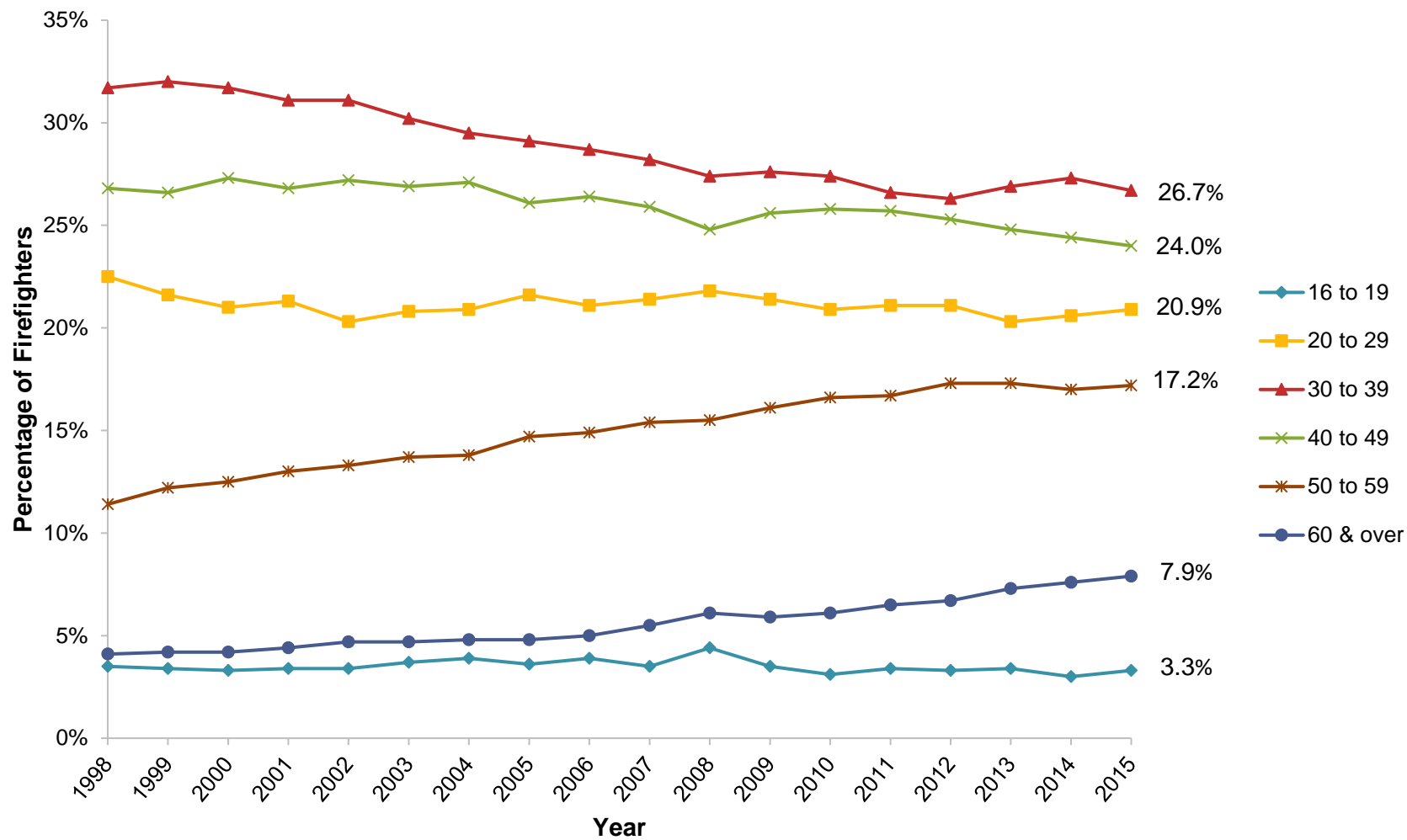
Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015



**Table 9.**  
Age Profile of Firefighters by Size of Community, 2015.

Size of Community	Percent Firefighters under Age 30	Percent Firefighters Age 30-39	Percent Firefighters Age 40-49	Percent Firefighters Age 50 and up	Total
<b>Mostly Career Firefighters</b>					
1,000,000 or more	9.2%	32.4%	32.5%	25.9%	100.0%
500,000 to 999,999	14.2%	29.5%	33.7%	22.7%	100.0%
250,000 to 499,999	14.5%	32.6%	32.6%	20.3%	100.0%
100,000 to 249,000	14.6%	31.5%	33.1%	20.9%	100.0%
50,000 to 99,999	17.6%	33.2%	31.2%	18.1%	100.0%
25,000 to 49,999	21.0%	31.7%	28.2%	19.0%	100.0%
<b>Mostly Volunteer Firefighters</b>					
10,000 to 24,999	28.3%	28.9%	24.1%	18.6%	100.0%
5,000 to 9,999	30.3%	26.2%	20.8%	22.7%	100.0%
2,500 to 4,999	28.3%	26.0%	22.9%	23.8%	100.0%
Under 2,500	23.9%	23.6%	21.6%	30.8%	100.0%

Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.



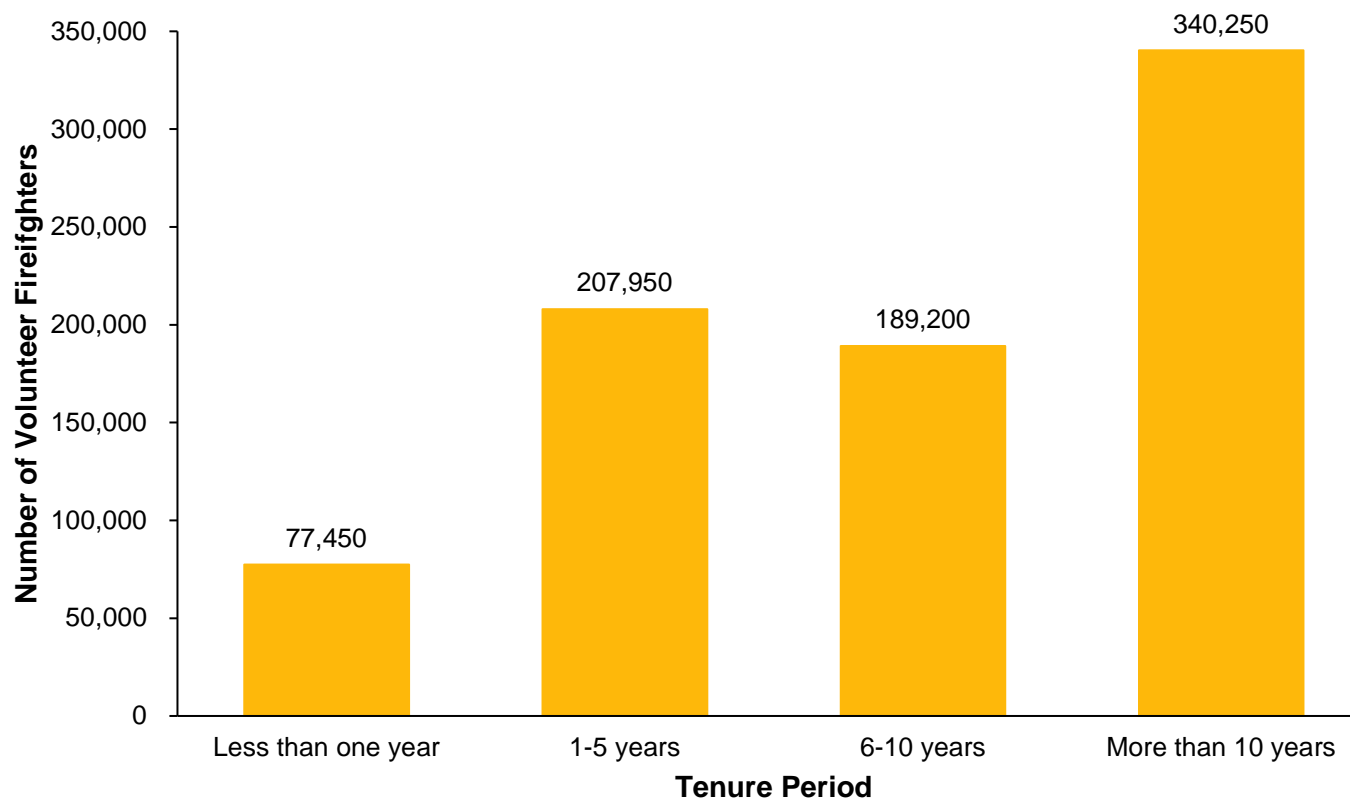
**Figure 4:** Percent of Firefighters in the U.S. by Age Group by Year.

Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 1998-2015.

**Table 10.**  
Volunteer Firefighter Tenure Period by Number and Percentage, 2015.

<b>Tenure Active</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than one year	77,450	9.5%
1-5 years	207,950	25.5%
6-10 years	189,200	23.2%
More than 10 years	340,250	41.8%
Total	814,850	100.0%

Source: NFPA Survey of fire Departments for U.S. fire Experience, 2015.



**Figure 5:** Number of Volunteer Firefighters by Tenure Period, 2015.

Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.

**Table 11.**  
Tenure Profile of Volunteer Firefighters by Size of Community, 2015

Size of Community	Percent of Firefighters less than 1 year	Percent of Firefighters 1-5 years	Percent of Firefighters 6-10 years	Percent of Firefighters more than 10 years	Total
<b>Mostly Career Firefighters</b>					
1,000,000 or more	4.2%	42.8%	19.9%	33.1%	100.0%
500,000 to 999,999	11.3%	22.8%	2.2%	63.8%	100.0%
250,000 to 499,999	9.3%	47.4%	12.5%	30.9%	100.0%
100,000 to 249,000	23.3%	42.7%	17.0%	17.0%	100.0%
50,000 to 99,999	14.6%	33.8%	21.3%	30.3%	100.0%
25,000 to 49,999	13.3%	36.0%	20.1%	30.6%	100.0%
10,000 to 24,999	12.9%	32.0%	21.7%	33.3%	100.0%
5,000 to 9,999	10.2%	26.2%	23.4%	40.2%	100.0%
2,500 to 4,999	9.2%	23.7%	23.7%	43.3%	100.0%
Under 2,500	8.1%	22.8%	23.9%	45.1%	100.0%
Total	9.5%	25.5%	23.2%	41.8%	100.0%

Source: NFPA Survey of fire Departments for U.S. fire Experience, 2015.

## Fire Departments

There are an estimated 29,727 fire departments<sup>4</sup> in the United States ([Table 12](#)). Of these, 2,651 (8.9%) of departments are comprised solely of career firefighters<sup>5</sup>, and 19,762 (66.5%) of departments are comprised of all volunteer firefighters. An estimated 1,893 (6.4%) are mostly career, while 5,421 (18.2%) are mostly volunteer firefighters ([Table 12](#)).

Fire departments categorized as all career or mostly career represent 15.3% of all departments and protect 64.9% of the U.S. population, while departments categorized as mostly volunteer or all volunteer represent 85.0% of all departments and protect 35.1% of the U.S. population ([Table 12](#)).

The number of career or mostly career departments increased from 3,043 in 1986 to 4,544 in 2015, an increase of 49.3%, while the number of volunteer or mostly volunteer departments decreased from 26,797 in 1986 to 25,183 in 2015, a decrease of 6.0% (see [Appendix 1](#))

The number of fire departments by size of community is provided in [Table 13](#). Department type did vary considerably by population protected. For community sizes 25,000 and above, the percentage of departments classified as all career or mostly career ranged from 74.6 to 100%, while for community sizes less than 25,000, the percentage of departments classified as all volunteer or mostly volunteer ranged from 53.3 to 98.2% ([Table 14](#)).

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<sup>4</sup> A fire department is a public organization that provides fire prevention, fire suppression and associated emergency and non-emergency services to a jurisdiction such as a county, municipality, or organized fire district.

<sup>5</sup> Department type is broken into four categories. All career departments are comprised 100% of career firefighters. Mostly career is comprised of 51 to 99% career firefighters, while volunteer is comprised of 1 to 50% career firefighters. All volunteer departments are comprised 100% of volunteer firefighters.



**Figure 6:** Locations of fire departments by population protected.  
Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2011–2013.

**Table 12.**  
Number of Departments and Percent of U.S. Population Protected by Type of Department, 2015.

Type of Department	Number	Percent	Percent of U.S. Population Protected
All Career	2,651	8.9%	49.2%
Mostly Career	1,893	6.4%	15.6%
Mostly Volunteer	5,421	18.2%	16.0%
All Volunteer	19,762	66.5%	19.1%
Total	29,727	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey 2013-2015, and NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.

Department type is broken into four categories. All career departments are comprised 100% of career firefighters. Mostly career is comprised of 51 to 99% career firefighters, while volunteer is comprised of 1 to 50% career firefighters. All volunteer departments are comprised 100% of volunteer firefighters.



**Table 13.**  
Number of Fire Departments in the U.S. by Population Protected, 2015.

Population Protected	Number of Fire Departments	Percentage
1,000,000 or more	16	0.1%
500,000 to 999,999	42	0.1%
250,000 to 499,999	62	0.2%
100,000 - 249,999	272	0.9%
50,000 to 99,999	541	1.8%
25,000 to 49,999	1,320	4.4%
10,000 to 24,999	3,529	11.9%
5,000 to 9,999	4,283	14.4%
2,500 to 4,999	5,409	18.2%
Under 2,500	14,253	47.9%
Total	29,727	100.0%

Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2013-2015.

**Table 14.**  
Department Type by Population Protected, 2015.

Population Protected	All Career	Mostly Career	Mostly Volunteer	All Volunteer	Total
1,000,000 or more	69.2%	30.8%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
500,000 to 999,999	80.0%	13.3%	6.7%	0.0%	100.0%
250,000 to 499,999	81.8%	15.2%	3.0%	0.0%	100.0%
100,000 - 249,999	87.3%	10.3%	1.6%	0.8%	100.0%
50,000 to 99,999	69.8%	17.3%	11.9%	1.0%	100.0%
25,000 to 49,999	52.2%	22.3%	19.2%	6.2%	100.0%
10,000 to 24,999	21.6%	25.1%	35.9%	17.5%	100.0%
5,000 to 9,999	6.3%	8.6%	40.4%	44.8%	100.0%
2,500 to 4,999	0.9%	1.8%	23.3%	74.0%	100.0%
Under 2,500	1.2%	0.7%	5.5%	92.7%	100.0%
All Departments	8.9%	6.4%	18.2%	66.5%	100.0%

Source: NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.

Department type is broken into four categories. All career departments are comprised 100% of career firefighters. Mostly career is comprised of 51 to 99% career firefighters, while volunteer is comprised of 1 to 50% career firefighters. All volunteer departments are comprised 100% of volunteer firefighters.

## Fire Department Apparatus and Stations

Estimates of the number of apparatus and stations in the United States for the 2013-2015 period indicate that there were 71,800 pumpers, 7,300 aerial apparatuses, 79,050 other suppression vehicles (which includes pumpers less than 1,000 gpm, hose usage, brush vehicles, tanker, etc.) and 58,750 stations.

[Table 15](#) provides a breakdown of the average apparatus and station rates by community size.<sup>6</sup>

**It is worth emphasizing what the indicated rates in Table 15 really mean. The numbers reflect apparatus averages and station rates per 1,000 people by population protected reported to the NFPA. They do *not* represent recommended rates or some defined fire protection standard.**

The rates are higher for departments protecting smaller communities (under 2,500). This is because it takes a minimum number of apparatus and stations to operate a fire department regardless of the number of people protected. For instance, for a department protecting 1,000 people, you would expect according to Table 15 an average of 1.192 pumpers, 1.871 other suppression vehicles, 0.035 aerial apparatus, and 0.943 stations. The 0.943 stations per 1,000 people is the highest rate shown in Table 15, but for this community size it is equivalent to one station per department. Another way to put this is that for every 100 departments protecting 1,000 people, you would expect approximately 119 pumpers, 187 other suppression vehicles, 4 aerial apparatus, and 94 stations. For communities of 25,000 to 999,999, the rates tend to be quite similar: 0.056 - 0.107 pumpers per 1,000 people; and 0.024 - 0.067 other suppression vehicles; 0.014 - 0.022 aerial apparatus per 1,000 people, and 0.055 - 0.095 stations per 1,000 people.

[Table 16](#), [Table 17](#), [Table 18](#), and [Table 19](#) display the prevalence of pumpers, other suppression vehicles, aerial apparatus, and stations by size of community.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that these results are based on a sample survey, and as a result there is a confidence interval associated with each estimate. Based on the data reported by fire departments responding to the NFPA Fire Service Survey (2013 -2015), the NFPA is 95% confident that the actual number of pumpers falls between 71,650 and 71,950; aerial apparatus between 7,250 and 7,350; other suppression vehicles between 78,800 and 79,300.

**Table 15.**  
Average Apparatus and Station Rates per 1,000 Population by Community Size, 2013-2015.

Population Protected	Pumpers per 1,000 Population	Other Suppression Vehicles <sup>7</sup> per 1,000 Population	Aerial Apparatus per 1,000 Population	Stations per 1,000 Population
1,000,000 or more	0.034	0.010	0.013	0.034
500,000 to 999,999	0.056	0.024	0.015	0.055
250,000 to 499,999	0.058	0.025	0.014	0.058
100,000 - 249,999	0.067	0.031	0.014	0.070
50,000 to 99,999	0.085	0.041	0.016	0.083
25,000 to 49,999	0.107	0.067	0.022	0.095
10,000 to 24,999	0.185	0.138	0.034	0.151
5,000 to 9,999	0.321	0.298	0.037	0.310
2,500 to 4,999	0.548	0.642	0.030	0.353
Under 2,500	1.192	1.871	0.035	0.943
National Average	0.224	0.224	0.023	0.183

Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2013-2015.

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<sup>7</sup> Other suppression vehicles include apparatus with pumps less than 1,000 gpm, hose wagons, brush fire vehicles, tankers, etc.

**These results reflect average apparatus and station rates per 1,000 people by population protected reported to the NFPA. They do not reflect recommended rates or some defined fire protection standard.**

**Table 16.**  
Pumpers (1,000 gpm or greater) by Community Size, 2013-2015.

Percentage of U.S. Fire Departments With						
Population Protected	1-5 Pumpers	6-9 Pumpers	10-19 Pumpers	20-39 Pumpers	40 or More Pumpers	Total
1,000,000 or more	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
500,000 to 999,999	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	63.4%	34.1%	100.0%
250,000 to 499,999	0.0%	3.3%	50.0%	43.3%	3.3%	100.0%
100,000 - 249,999	15.7%	43.8%	32.9%	7.2%	0.4%	100.0%

Percentage of U.S. Fire Departments With						
Population Protected	No Pumpers	1 Pumper	2 Pumpers	3-4 Pumpers	5 or More Pumpers	Total
50,000 to 99,999	1.4%	1.2%	7.5%	33.5%	56.3%	100.0%
25,000 to 49,999	1.2%	5.1%	23.3%	45.6%	24.8%	100.0%
10,000 to 24,999	0.8%	8.5%	33.3%	47.2%	10.2%	100.0%
5,000 to 9,999	1.3%	14.5%	44.6%	36.0%	3.5%	100.0%
2,500 to 4,999	2.2%	22.9%	50.3%	23.4%	1.3%	100.0%
Under 2,500	10.8%	41.4%	39.3%	8.3%	0.2%	100.0%

Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2013-2015.

Note that pumpers reported above had a capability of 1,000 gpm or greater. Note that many departments reported other fire suppression vehicles including apparatus with pumps less than 1,000 gpm, hose wagons, brush fire vehicles, tankers, etc.

**Table 17.**  
Other Suppression Vehicles by Community Size, 2013-2015.

Percentage of U.S. Fire Departments With Other Suppression Vehicles							
Population Protected	1-3	4-5	6-9	10-19	20-29	30 or More	Total
1,000,000 or more	18.8%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	31.3%	100.0%
500,000 to 999,999	15.4%	15.4%	12.8%	28.2%	15.4%	12.8%	100.0%
250,000 to 499,999	21.6%	17.6%	23.5%	23.5%	9.8%	3.9%	100.0%
100,000 - 249,999	52.6%	15.8%	17.3%	9.2%	2.0%	3.1%	100.0%

Percentage of U.S. Fire Departments With Other Suppression Vehicles						
Population Protected	None	1	2	3-4	5 or More	Total
50,000 to 99,999	29.6%	18.0%	15.7%	18.8%	17.8%	100.0%
25,000 to 49,999	29.9%	22.3%	17.7%	17.3%	12.8%	100.0%
10,000 to 24,999	24.4%	22.8%	20.1%	21.1%	11.6%	100.0%
5,000 to 9,999	17.1%	22.5%	25.2%	25.7%	9.6%	100.0%
2,500 to 4,999	11.5%	20.8%	27.8%	30.3%	9.6%	100.0%
Under 2,500	9.8%	23.3%	28.6%	29.8%	8.5%	100.0%

Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2013-2015.

Other suppression vehicles include apparatus with pumps less than 1,000 gpm, hose wagons, brush fire vehicles, tankers, etc.

**Table 18.**  
Aerial Apparatus by Community Size, 2013-2015.

Population Protected	Percentage of U.S. Fire Departments With					Total
	No Aerial Apparatus	1-5 Aerial Apparatus	6-9 Aerial Apparatus	10-19 Aerial Apparatus	20 or More Aerial Apparatus	
1,000,000 or more	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%	31.3%	56.3%	100.0%
500,000 to 999,999	4.9%	19.5%	29.3%	39.0%	7.3%	100.0%
250,000 to 499,999	4.9%	63.9%	24.6%	6.6%	0.0%	100.0%

Population Protected	Percentage of U.S. Fire Departments With					Total
	No Aerial Apparatus	1 Aerial Apparatus	2 Aerial Apparatus	3-4 Aerial Apparatus	5 or More Aerial Apparatus	
100,000 to 249,999	19.4%	25.0%	26.6%	18.7%	10.3%	100.0%
50,000 to 99,999	29.0%	39.1%	24.0%	7.5%	0.4%	100.0%
25,000 to 49,999	36.5%	50.6%	12.5%	0.4%	0.1%	100.0%
10,000 to 24,999	49.4%	47.1%	3.3%	0.2%	0.1%	100.0%
5,000 to 9,999	73.3%	25.7%	0.9%	0.1%	0.0%	100.0%
2,500 to 4,999	89.2%	10.4%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Under 2,500	96.0%	3.7%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%

Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2013-2015.

**Table 19.**  
Fire Stations by Community Size, 2013-2015.

Population Protected	Percentage of U.S. Fire Departments With					Total
	1-5 Stations	6-9 Stations	10-19 Stations	20-29 Stations	30 or More Stations	
1,000,000 or more	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	93.8%	100.0%
500,000 to 999,999	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	19.5%	78.0%	100.0%
250,000 to 499,999	0.0%	1.6%	49.2%	41.0%	8.2%	100.0%
100,000 - 249,999	9.9%	43.7%	39.7%	4.4%	2.4%	100.0%

Population Protected	Percentage of U.S. Fire Departments With					Total
	No Stations	1 Station	2 Stations	3 Stations	4 or More Stations	
50,000 to 99,999	0.0%	1.0%	3.5%	14.5%	81.0%	100.0%
25,000 to 49,999	0.0%	13.2%	24.3%	27.9%	34.6%	100.0%
10,000 to 24,999	0.0%	44.8%	30.5%	13.9%	10.8%	100.0%
5,000 to 9,999	0.1%	69.0%	20.8%	6.3%	3.8%	100.0%
2,500 to 4,999	0.1%	77.4%	16.8%	4.0%	1.7%	100.0%
Under 2,500	0.4%	86.4%	10.8%	1.7%	0.7%	100.0%

Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2013-2015.



## Emergency Medical Services

The level of emergency medical service (EMS) provided by fire departments by size of community protected for the 2013-2015 period is provided in [Table 20](#). The larger the community, the more likely EMS service was provided. Nationwide, 13,500 (45.4%) departments provided EMS with basic life support, 4,617 (15.5%) departments provided EMS with advanced life support, and 11,610 (39.1%) departments did not provide EMS.

## U.S. Expenditures on Local Fire Protection

[Table 21](#) provides expenditures on local fire protection by governments, with and without adjustment for inflation. Note that these expenditures adjusted for inflation, have risen 170% from 1980 to 2014. Other municipal service costs like police protection have risen in a similar manner.

Fire protection costs rose 113% from 1986 to 2014 after adjusting for inflation, while the number of career firefighters increased 46% ([Table 2](#)). Since chiefs of fire departments serving larger communities report problems with shrinking budgets or with level budgets combined with increasing responsibilities, this clear pattern of increasing fire department resources nationwide is difficult to interpret. Some of the factors possibly contributing to this increase in costs are (1) shrinkage of the work week<sup>8</sup> for some departments, which results in a need to increase staffing and apparatus or to pay firefighters at overtime rates; (2) increased EMS responsibilities that require increased staffing and, in some communities, a more frequent replacement of apparatus; and (3) rising costs of retirement and health benefits.

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<sup>8</sup> This is the result at least to some extent of the Fair Labor Standards Act being applied to municipal fire departments.

**Table 20.**  
Departments Providing Emergency Medical Service by  
Community Size (Percent), 2013-2015.

Population Protected	No EMS	BLS	ALS	Total
1,000,000 or more	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
500,000 to 999,999	0.0%	29.3%	70.7%	100.0%
250,000 to 499,999	1.6%	26.2%	72.1%	100.0%
100,000 - 249,999	3.2%	33.3%	63.5%	100.0%
50,000 to 99,999	6.4%	37.3%	56.3%	100.0%
25,000 to 49,999	16.4%	36.7%	46.9%	100.0%
10,000 to 24,999	27.2%	41.2%	31.6%	100.0%
5,000 to 9,999	38.5%	43.2%	18.4%	100.0%
2,500 to 4,999	41.2%	46.6%	12.2%	100.0%
Under 2,500	45.7%	48.2%	6.1%	100.0%
Nationwide	39.1%	45.4%	15.5%	100.0%

Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2013-2015.

BLS refers to fire departments providing basic life support and ALS refers to fire departments providing advanced life support.

**Table 21.**  
Direct Expenditures on Local Fire Protection.

Year	Expenditures (in Billions)	Expenditures (in Billions) Adjusted for Inflation*	U.S. Resident Population
1980	\$5.7	\$16.4	227,225
1981	\$6.3	\$16.5	229,466
1982	\$7.0	\$17.2	231,664
1983	\$7.6	\$18.1	233,792
1984	\$8.2	\$18.7	235,825
1985	\$8.5	\$18.8	237,924
1986	\$9.6	\$20.8	240,133
1987	\$10.5	\$21.9	242,289
1988	\$11.8	\$23.7	244,499
1989	\$11.9	\$22.8	246,819
1990	\$13.2	\$24.0	249,464
1991	\$13.8	\$24.1	252,153
1992	\$14.4	\$24.4	255,030
1993	\$15.4	\$25.3	257,783
1994	\$16.1	\$25.8	260,327
1995	\$17.0	\$26.5	262,803
1996	\$17.7	\$26.8	265,229
1997	\$19.4	\$28.7	267,784
1998	\$20.3	\$29.6	270,248
1999	\$21.3	\$30.3	272,691
2000	\$23.1	\$31.8	282,172
2001	\$25.0	\$33.5	285,082
2002	\$26.0	\$34.3	287,804
2003	\$28.4	\$36.6	290,326
2004	\$30.7	\$38.6	293,046
2005	\$34.2	\$41.6	295,753
2006	\$34.2	\$40.3	298,593
2007	\$36.8	\$42.1	301,580
2008	\$39.7	\$43.8	304,375
2009	\$40.3	\$44.6	307,007
2010	\$42.6	\$46.4	309,326
2011	\$42.3	\$44.6	311,583
2012	\$42.5	\$43.5	313,874

**Table 21.**  
Direct Expenditures on Local Fire Protection. (Continued)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Expenditures (in Billions)</b>	<b>Expenditures (in Billions) Adjusted for Inflation*</b>	<b>U.S. Resident Population</b>
2013	\$43.4	\$44.2	316,129
2014	\$44.1	\$44.2	318,857

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Economy-wide Statistics Division*.

\*Adjustments were made to 2015 dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

## Appendix 1. Number of U.S. Fire Departments

Year	Total	All Career	Mostly Career	Mostly Volunteer	All Volunteer
1986	29,840	1,999	1,044	3,640	23,157
1987	29,741	1,683	1,335	3,635	23,088
1988	30,245	1,729	1,405	3,908	23,203
1989	30,315	1,799	1,303	3,878	23,335
1990	30,391	1,949	1,338	4,000	23,104
1991	30,587	2,017	1,257	4,162	23,151
1992	30,562	1,843	1,217	4,377	23,125
1993	30,528	1,646	1,342	4,378	23,162
1994	30,495	1,778	1,448	4,400	22,869
1995	31,197	1,831	1,660	4,581	23,125
1996	31,503	1,872	1,380	4,863	23,388
1997	30,665	1,979	1,490	4,808	22,388
1998	31,114	2,028	1,602	4,848	22,636
1999	30,436	1,752	1,639	4,651	22,394
2000	30,339	2,178	1,667	4,523	21,971
2001	30,020	1,928	1,539	4,671	21,882
2002	30,310	2,044	1,480	4,886	21,900
2003	30,542	2,018	1,582	5,271	21,671
2004	30,400	1,917	1,242	4,084	23,157
2005	30,300	2,087	1,766	4,902	21,575
2006	30,635	2,321	1,731	5,134	21,449
2007	30,185	2,263	1,765	4,989	21,168
2008	30,170	2,315	1,790	4,830	21,235
2009	30,165	2,457	1,752	5,099	20,857
2010	30,125	2,495	1,860	5,290	20,480
2011	30,145	2,550	1,865	5,530	20,200
2012	30,100	2,610	1,995	5,445	20,050
2013	30,052	2,477	1,971	5,797	19,807
2014	29,980	2,440	2,045	5,580	19,915
2015	29,727	2,651	1,893	5,421	19,762

A fire department is a public or private organization that provides fire prevention, fire suppression and associated emergency and non-emergency services to a jurisdiction such as a county, municipality, or organized fire district.

Source: NFPA Fire Service Inventory and NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for U.S. Fire Experience, 1986-2015.

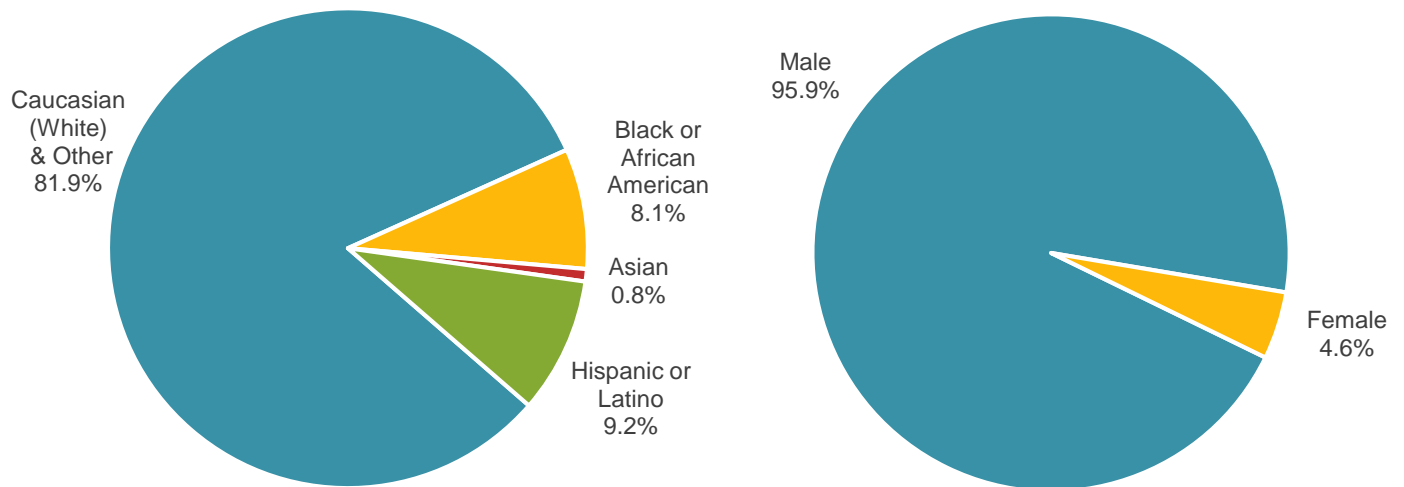
## Appendix 2. Number of Fire Stations, Pumpers, Other Suppression Vehicles and Aerial Apparatus

Year	U. S. Fire Stations	Pumpers >1,000 gpm	Other Suppression Vehicles*	Aerial Apparatus
1995-1997	48,850	68,300	---	6,450
1996-1998	51,000	69,150	---	6,450
1997-1999	52,100	69,000	---	6,300
1998-2000	49,200	68,200	---	6,400
1999-2001	51,500	68,000	---	6,500
2000-2002	50,900	67,950	---	6,300
2001-2003	51,650	68,950	---	6,500
2002-2004	51,450	67,800	---	6,500
2003-2005	52,950	68,950	---	6,600
2004-2006	53,200	69,300	---	6,700
2005-2007	51,900	68,050	74,350	6,750
2006-2008	52,400	68,200	75,300	6,725
2007-2009	52,050	68,400	74,250	6,750
2008-2010	51,300	66,800	72,800	6,800
2009-2011	55,400	67,000	73,800	6,900
2010-2012	51,650	66,900	74,000	6,900
2011-2013	51,150	69,150	76,300	7,000
2012-2014	58,150	70,550	81,000	7,200
2013-2015	58,750	71,800	79,050	7,300

\* Other suppression vehicles include apparatus with pumps less than 1,000 gpm, hose wagons, brush fire vehicles, tankers, etc.

Source: NFPA Fire Service Survey, 2013-2015 and NFPA Survey of Fire Departments for the U.S. Fire Experience, 2015.

### Appendix 3. Average Percentage of Career Firefighters by Gender, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity (2011-2015)



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Averages Tables Employment and Earnings

\*Note: These statistics do not include volunteer firefighters