



Preparing for a Fire Service Career?

This information provides an overview of a typical Firefighter job description and may help you prepare for the Firefighter Testing Process for a career in the Connecticut Fire Service. The material presented here also offers general information that may be helpful in pursuing a career in the fire service and is not specific to any or all Fire Departments. The Connecticut Fire Academy recognizes that the information is subject to change and is not responsible for outdated, inaccurate or misinterpreted information. In addition, please review the city/town job description and Firefighter job announcement (if available) for those specific cities/towns the applicant may be interested. The Connecticut Fire Academy respects, values and welcomes diversity in all of the state's workplaces. We strongly encourage all interested people to apply for firefighting job postings.

Firefighter Job Overview

The journey to become a Firefighter is very competitive and requires significant effort. A Connecticut Fire Department may receive up to 1000 applicants every testing cycle and only approximately 1-3% of those applicants will become entry level Firefighters.

A career in the fire service is challenging and rewarding. A Firefighter may be a member of a three-four person crew that lives and works in close quarters throughout a work shift. While living at the fire station for up to 24 hours at a time, firefighters train, cook, clean, maintain equipment and the station and build relationships with each other, their customers and the surrounding communities. Crew members depend on each other, whether they are working at the fire station or responding to emergency calls. In the fire service, everything is done as a team. When we succeed, everyone succeeds and when we fail, everyone fails.

Shift Schedules may vary. In Connecticut the 24 hour shift schedule is becoming more common. Others are; 3-Days, 3-Off, 3-Nights, 3-Off or 2-Days, 2 Nights, 4 Days Off. During a shift, calls for emergency services are received around the clock every day of the week.

Firefighting is small portion of the duties performed by firefighters. Most Connecticut Fire Departments provide Emergency Medical Services to their communities. Approximately 75% of Fire Department responses are to EMS related calls such as motor vehicle accidents, falls, difficulty breathing, chest pain, etc. Other assignments may include Fire and Life Safety programs, commercial and residential fire inspections, community outreach, salvage and fire clean up and many other department or customer service-related activities.



Much of a firefighters shift may be spent training, cleaning and maintaining fire apparatus and its equipment, maintaining the station and studying. During fire ground activities and vehicle extrications, firefighters must wear protective equipment that weighs up to 75 pounds, while manipulating cumbersome tools and large hose lines. It is imperative that the firefighter is physically fit and works out both on and off shift to maintain the highest level of readiness, and to sustain a healthy career.

General Qualifications

To become a Connecticut Career Firefighter you must first apply for the position at the city or town that may be hiring or posting for the entry position. Every city or town in Connecticut has its own criteria for hiring and is responsible for their own examination process. A prospective firefighter should research where they would be interested to work and the hiring process for that department. Most towns rank candidates based on the results of a written examination and oral interview or assessment.

In Connecticut a firefighter applicant must be 18 years of minimum age and have an education to a high school graduate level to receive the initial training.

Other minimum requirements or levels may vary from city to city and may include:

- Some type of Emergency Medical training;
 - Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) or
 - Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification or
 - A licensed Paramedic
- Obtained a CDL or Q endorsed driver license
- Have previous certification to the NFPA Firefighter I or II standards

You may be also required to pass a Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT). You can take the CPAT during the schedule spring and fall sessions at the Connecticut Fire Academy CPAT Center in Meriden. You can also obtain a CPAT from another state's fire training organization or from a private company such as the National Testing Network (NTN). Make sure that the organization providing the CPAT, whether it's a community college, fire service training entity, fire department, or private company, is a CPAT Licensee and their results will be can be released to you and accepted by the individual fire department you will be applying to. This is your responsibility. Do not wait until the last minute to pass a CPAT or you may be excluded from applying or participating in the fire department's testing process.



Preparation

Firefighting is physically and mentally demanding and requires excellent physical conditioning. A firefighter must possess good judgment, communication skills, mechanical aptitude, basic math skills and ability to comprehend and apply the techniques of firefighting taught during the recruit academy.

Becoming a firefighter often takes a great deal of long term preparation, self-motivation, and commitment. There is no guarantee that any of the following suggestions will help you in your success, but experience has shown that these kinds of activities distinguish the best candidates, and demonstrates your interest in the fire service.

Although an advanced education may not be a minimum requirement to be a firefighter; there are several types of Fire Science related certifications and degrees available. Some Connecticut Community Colleges and the University of New Haven offer fire related degree programs. These classes and programs provide important knowledge and exposure to many aspects of the job as a firefighter. A college degree in the fire service will not necessarily help you, but it won't hinder you. Earning a degree shows a certain amount of maturity, ambition, and education, all good traits to present when trying to get hired. Degrees are important when a firefighter moves up the chain of command to supervisory or chief officer positions.

A solid work record that shows increasing responsibility is a good start. It does not matter where you work or what you do, as long as you have good work habits such as showing up on time, being dependable and responsible.

While experience as a volunteer firefighter is helpful, volunteer experience in general is important. A history helping in the community shows you have the right mind-set to be a firefighter. Becoming a volunteer for the American Red Cross is a good way to find if emergency service work is for you.

Experience in the fields such as the building trades or mechanical fields will be an asset on the job. Firefighters must understand building construction and be skilled in using hand and power tools.

For anyone considering a career in the fire service; **BE CAREFUL**; the choices you make in life can affect your ability to be hired. A conviction for disorderly conduct or DWI may disqualify you from a fire department job. Your online footprint may also be checked by prospective employers; “delete” does not mean it's gone.



Physical Fitness

A career in the fire service requires a dedication to a healthy lifestyle that must include a commitment to physical fitness. Those individuals that lack the discipline to maintain above average levels of aerobic capacity, anaerobic capacity, muscular strength, endurance, balance, and flexibility are not and will not be effective firefighters. They put themselves, their peers, and the public at risk every time they engage in high risk, physically demanding fire ground operations.

The Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) was developed by the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and 10 pairs of local unions and their municipalities as a component of the Fire Service Joint labor Management Wellness-Fitness Initiative. The goal of the CPAT is to provide a fair and valid evaluation tool to assist in the selection of firefighters, and to ensure that all firefighters candidates possesses the physical ability to participate in critical tasks effectively and safely. In actuality, the CPAT ensures that an applicant possesses the minimum physical attributes to begin the recruit academy, **but by no means is an indicator as to whether or not the applicant will successfully complete the physical components associated with recruit training.**

Many factors contribute to an applicant's ability to successfully complete the physical tasks inherent in recruit fire academy. For example, staying in shape and continuing a workout regimen will ensure you are ready to begin a firefighter recruit academy. In some cases, applicants fail to maintain a level of physical preparedness in anticipation of a job offer. They then discover that the amount of time between their initial job offer and their first day of the fire academy has provided them little time to adequately prepare. These individuals quickly learn that they have insufficient aerobic and anaerobic capacity, as well as muscular strength and endurance, to successfully participating in fire ground evolutions and the daily physical training program.

Those who have chosen to pursue a fire service career need to continually improve their physical fitness level. This is not your average profession, and in order to perform as a firefighter you need to have above average physical fitness levels. Use your time wisely to train specially for a career in the Fire Service. Seek the advice of an ACE Certified Peer Fitness Instructor or other Certified Health & Fitness Instructors. The American College of Sports Medicine and the American Council on Exercise are a couple of resources that may be helpful.



Miscellaneous

Once hired, a firefighter may have to attend a Firefighter Recruit Training Program delivered by the city's or town's Fire Department or the Connecticut Fire Academy's Recruit Firefighter Program, which is a 70 day course. This training is physically demanding and requires a new firefighter to be in top physical condition as well as the ability to meet academic requirements.

Several fire service web sites have forums discussing the hiring process. These are also good resources to learn about the fire service culture and tradition if you are not a member of a fire department.

There are many job opportunities in the fire Service. In some circumstances, civilian positions are available with Fire Prevention, Fire Administration and Fire Dispatch. Please check the Connecticut Commission on Fire Prevention and Control's informational emails. The information sent to your email address serves the Connecticut Fire Service as a means of communicating important events, happenings and job opportunities. Contact the Secretary to the State Fire Administrator by calling 860-264-9231 or email kara.ouellette@ct.gov to add your address and receive the daily email.

Thank you for choosing the Connecticut Fire Academy and we hope this helps you achieve your goal of becoming Firefighter. Remember, "Firefighter" doesn't describe what you do, it describes who you *are*.

START YOUR PREPARATION NOW

The above information has been developed from National Fire Department's and Fire Service organization's job advertisements, preparation guides and materials. It is intended to serve as reference and has a mixture of opinion and fact. All this material is subject to change. The Connecticut Fire Academy is not responsible for misinformation or misinterpretation.