



Palo Alto Fire Department

Fire Department Staffing & Response FAQs

How many calls does Palo Alto Fire Department handle annually?

In 2024, PAFD responded to 9,881 calls for service, an increase of 5% over 2023 and 1.5% of those calls were fire related. The City has 6 full time fire stations, with a total of 5 engines, one ladder truck, and 3 ambulances, with resources deployed strategically to be most effective for emergency response to the City's and Stanford's needs as a whole—not individual neighborhoods. For example, the City's single ladder truck is best stationed close to most of the City's high rises, which are Downtown and on Stanford's campus.

Specific to the neighborhood areas around Fire Station 4, 73% of emergency responses are medical emergencies, so having an ambulance at Fire Station 4 is very beneficial. The fire engines from Fire Stations 3 (Rinconada) and 5 (Juana Briones/Barron Park) respond to an incident in Fire Station 4's neighborhoods within the same time frame that other neighborhoods receive.

How are resources deployed to emergencies in Palo Alto?

PAFD works as a citywide system to respond quickly to any incident. PAFD provides fire protection and emergency medical services (EMS) throughout the City and Stanford, and as noted 1.5% of all calls related to fires. Palo Alto is unique as it manages its own emergency medical transport services, the only community that has this service delivery model in Santa Clara County.

PAFD uses GPS locations of all of its apparatus to best determine which resource to send to an emergency a GPS signal provides an Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) to ensure that the closest resource responds, providing the quickest response possible.

What has been done to restore fire staffing and resources?

In FY21, due to budget constraints in response to the pandemic, the City Council reduced fire staffing and programming to address a \$40 million deficit. Impacts included brownouts at Fire Station 2 on nights and weekends. Enhancements have been made to reconfigure staffing and resources since that time. In FY22, Council budget enhancements supported a communitywide approach, ensuring resources at all six stations based on service needs. As noted, these changes have ensured consistent fire and emergency medical response citywide.

Additional investment in emergency medical and fire response supports the whole community and a near-term proposal to add a fire engine to the current ambulance staffing at Fire Station 4 will be considered by the City Council later in February. This recommendation supports emergency response Citywide while long-term staffing and funding options continue to take shape to respond to changing service demand, population growth and other priorities.

The near-term proposal would add a fire engine to the current ambulance at Fire Station 4 and includes adding one additional person to Fire Station 4, for a total of three personnel. The three personnel would staff both the fire engine and the ambulance or what is known as cross-staffing. This is consistent with pre-COVID staffing at Fire Station 4. PAFD determines which apparatus (engine or ambulance) responds to a call based on the nature of the emergency. This proposal also involves putting into service one of PAFD's two reserve fire engines.

Does the Palo Alto Fire Station 4 Replacement Project Design Accommodate for the Addition of both Staffing and Fire Engine Long-Term?

Yes, the design accommodates for long-term staffing changes. The approved design includes additional space, allowing it to grow with service level demands and population increases in this part of the City. The design includes accommodations for 5 personnel and 3 fire apparatus. The design supports the long-term plan to staff an engine and an ambulance at Fire Station 4 as soon as reasonably possible. The temporary Fire Station 4 at Cubberley also has the flexibility to support the interim approach noted above adding 1 firefighter and a fire engine in addition to the ambulance.

How will near-term recommendation change the current staffing at Fire Station 4?

This near-term proposal includes a staffing model called cross-staffing, this includes adding one additional person to Fire Station 4, through overtime, for a total of three personnel. The three personnel would staff both the fire engine and the ambulance. This is consistent with pre-COVID staffing at Fire Station 4. PAFD determines which apparatus (engine or ambulance) responds to a call based on the nature of the emergency. When either the fire engine or ambulance is responding to an incident, the other is taken out of service and emergency call responses are handled from other stations.

What is the difference between a fire engine and a ladder-truck?

Palo Alto fire engines have a water pump, carries 500 gallons of water and a compliment of fire hose to be effective in extinguishing a variety of fires.



(PAFD Fire Engine, with water)

The Palo Alto ladder-truck has a 110-foot aerial ladder, in addition to many other ground ladders, a compliment of tools to assist in auto extrication, rescue, ventilation and other needs related to the incidents typically seen in the City.



(PAFD Fire Truck, no water)