

# Alaska's First Responders

## Jobs and wages for those who handle emergencies

**A**laskans trained to respond quickly to emergencies routinely put themselves at risk to protect the lives and property of the rest of us. In 2012, Alaska had 3,788 workers who could be considered “first responders,” including police and troopers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, and emergency dispatchers. (See Exhibit 1.)

The category doesn't include the state's 88 village public safety officers, but this uniquely Alaskan job merits mention. VPSOs live in rural areas and respond to public safety emergencies. (See Exhibit 2.) They differ from police officers in that they require less training and they're unarmed, something that could change under a bill the Alaska Legislature is considering.

### Who they are

Of the 3,788 first responders in 2012, close to half were police or troopers, 30 percent were firefighters, and about 11 percent each were EMTs/paramedics and dispatchers.

All of these workers are trained in some form of urgent medical care and accident response. Emergency dispatchers, also known as 911 operators, aren't physically present at accident scenes or other traumas, but they're often the first point of contact in an emergency.

Most first responders work for local or state government and they're mostly men — about 75 percent — with an average age of 39.5 years.

### Jobs, wages have grown overall

This group of occupations grew 4.3 percent from

## 1 First Responders' Jobs and Wages Alaska, 2012

Job	Workers	Total Wages	Avg Annual Wages
Police and Troopers	1,806	\$121,481,078	\$67,265
Firefighters	1,146	\$66,446,049	\$57,981
Dispatchers	433	\$19,243,055	\$44,441
EMTs and Paramedics	403	\$17,767,698	\$44,089

Source: Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

2008 to 2012, or by 156 jobs — noticeably higher than the 2.9 percent growth for all jobs in Alaska.

Total first responder wages grew over that period by more than 18 percent, from \$190 million to \$225 million. The average wage increased by 13.9 percent, or \$7,100.

### Police, troopers, and VPSOs

Local police make up roughly two-thirds of law enforcement personnel in the state, and the rest are Alaska State Troopers. These officers are the largest share of first responders, but their numbers have dropped by 3.3 percent in recent years, from 1,867 in 2008 to 1,806 in 2012. The declines were mainly among police, as some local governments cut public services when revenue was thin. State troopers' numbers have stayed fairly flat.

Though police and troopers are needed everywhere, their distribution varies. (See Exhibit 3.) For example, Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough had more than half the state's population in 2012 but only about 40 percent of the state's police and troopers. Urban areas can be serviced by fewer officers per resident than more

## 2 Communities with Village Public Safety Officers

January 2014



Note: Anchorage and some other regional centers have no VPSOs, but have some VPSO administration personnel.  
 Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and Department of Public Safety, Alaska State Troopers Division

sparsely populated areas. The rural Northern Region had less than 4 percent of the state's population but nearly 9 percent of its police and troopers.

Police and troopers were the highest paid among first responders, earning an average of \$67,265 in 2012. They were also the oldest, with an average age of 40.4.

Of the state's 1,806 officers, 300 were supervisors. Their average age was 45, and they made \$87,778.

All of these earnings were a big jump from 2008 — more than 22 percent — and the biggest wage increase among all first responders. (See Exhibit 4.)

### 3 First Responders by Region

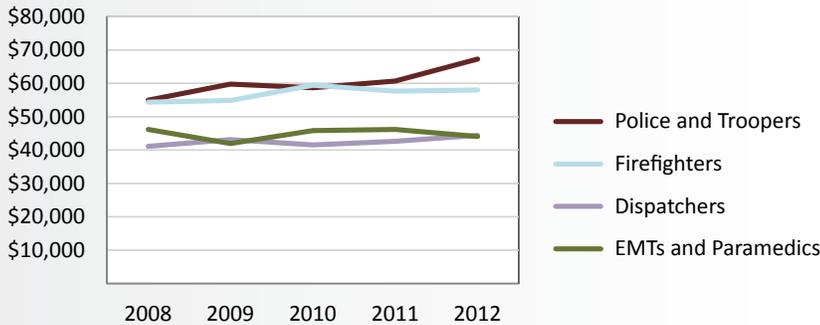
Alaska, 2012

	Police/ Troopers	Firefighters	Dispatchers	EMTs and Paramedics	VPSOs (as of 1/14)
Total	1,806	1,146	433	403	88
Northern	158	43	30	79	16
Interior	191	203	62	86	13
Southwest	272	60	59	39	41
Anchorage/Mat-Su	715	481	132	127	**
Gulf Coast	185	157	80	15	9
Southeast	283	112	70	56	9
Unknown	2	90	0	1	

Notes: Anchorage and some other regional centers have no VPSOs, but have some VPSO administration personnel. VPSO data are as of January 2014.  
 Sources: Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section, and Department of Public Safety, Alaska State Troopers Division

## 4 Officers' Wages Jumped Recently

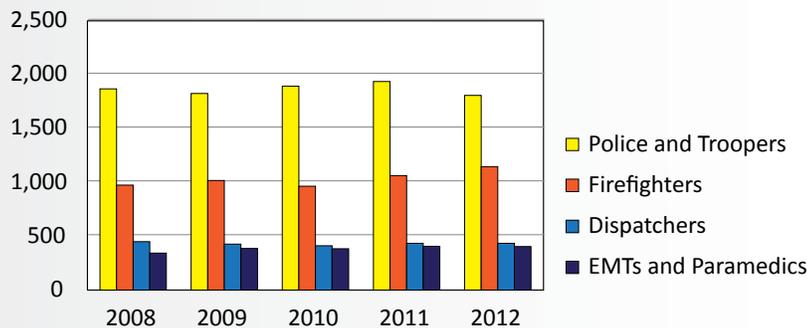
### Wages of Alaska's first responders, 2008 to 2012



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

## 5 EMTs, Firefighters Grew Most

### Alaska's first responders, 2006 to 2012



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Most Alaska police and troopers train at the Alaska Department of Public Safety Academy. The department's Alaska Law Enforcement Training is a 15-week residential program. Troopers attend an additional three weeks for the Trooper Basic Course.

Village public safety officers work under troopers' direction after completing 12 weeks of training at the academy. The VPSO program is financed by state funds administered through regional Native corporations, which assess villages' needs and work with troopers to select communities to participate.

VPSOs are "jacks of all trades" in their villages, responding to a variety of emergencies outside ba-

sic law enforcement. They help with search and rescue, fire protection, emergency medical assistance, and crime prevention. About 48 percent worked in Southwest communities in 2012, and less than 10 percent were in Southeast.

As of January 2014, 88 of the 116 authorized VPSO positions were filled. Data on total earnings weren't available, but VPSOs make \$25 per hour and have some overtime opportunities.

## Firefighters

Alaska gained 171 firefighters from 2008 to 2012, or 18 percent, largely to meet the needs of a growing population. (See Exhibit 5.) The growth may also be part of a national trend — fewer people now join as volunteers, prompting fire services to hire more career firefighters.

Of the 1,146 firefighters in 2012, more than 70 percent worked for local governments, 20 percent for private and Native corporations, and the remainder for the State of Alaska.

Anchorage/Mat-Su had more than 45 percent of the state's paid firefighters, far more than any other region. In general, rural areas rely more on volunteers. The Anchorage area, except for Chugiak and Girdwood, uses only full-time paid firefighters.

Though firefighting employment increased faster than that of police and troopers, wages grew slower. Firefighters earned about 7 percent more in 2012 than they did in 2008, for an average of \$57,981. The 144 supervisors earned \$81,483 on average.

The average age for all firefighters was 39.3, and the supervisors averaged 46.9 years.

Unlike police and troopers, firefighters don't have a training academy in the state. Many train as volunteers for a community fire service and eventually make it a career. The Anchorage Fire Department sometimes trains recruits on site.

## EMTs and paramedics

Like firefighters, the number of EMTs and para-

medics increased by 18 percent over the five-year period, to 403. Most worked for private businesses such as ambulance companies, hospitals, and oil-and-gas related companies. Less than 20 percent worked for local governments.

In general, rural areas need more emergency medical personnel per person. The Northern Region had nearly 20 percent of the state's EMTs and paramedics in 2012, with many of those working for oil and gas companies on the North Slope.

This group's wages dropped between 2008 and 2012 by about 4 percent to an average of \$44,089 a year. Lower wages may be a matter of supply and demand, as EMT training is relatively easy to attain in a short period of time.

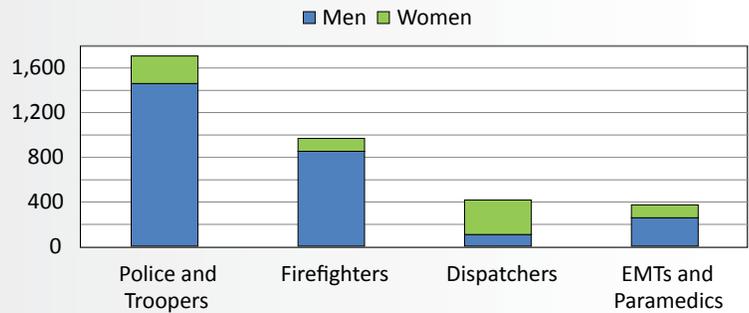
EMTs and paramedics need different training to become certified. All paramedics are EMTs, but not all EMTs are paramedics. Basic EMT-1 in Alaska requires successful completion of a 120-hour course plus CPR certification, training that's available throughout Alaska.

Paramedics require more extensive training, roughly equivalent to an associate degree, and are allowed to perform more complex medical tasks. Training to be a paramedic is available at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and Kenai Peninsula College. Some paramedics can also train EMTs.

## Dispatchers

Emergency dispatchers usually refer calls to police, fire services, or ambulance services, but they often give life-saving advice over the phone.

## 6 Mainly Men, Except Dispatchers Alaska's first responders, 2012



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Because of their position on the response chain, emergency dispatchers are sometimes called the *first* first responders.

Rural areas typically require proportionally more dispatchers, but dispatchers are more evenly spread throughout the state because this first point of contact is necessary regardless of population.

Dispatch employment declined slightly between 2008 and 2012, from 448 to 433. Seventy-five percent worked for local government in 2012 and most of the rest worked for the state. Though their numbers went down, their pay went up by about 8 percent to an average of \$44,441.

Emergency dispatchers were the only part of this group with more women than men, and considerably so — three out of four were women. (See Exhibit 6.)