



Semi - Annual  
Report  
2023





**We are...** The City of Billings organized the first Billings Fire Department in 1883. Billings Fire has 177 personnel, including firefighters, paramedics, EMTs, dispatchers, administrative staff, and fire prevention staff.

**We proudly serve...** All residents, businesses, and organizations within our response area including the Billings Urban Fire Service Area (BUFSA).

**Missions Statement**

The Billings Fire Department is dedicated to utilizing the latest education, methods, and technology in providing outstanding emergency services.

**Vision Statement**

The Billings Fire Department aspires to be the finest provider of emergency services.



**Total Calls for Service**

**10,253**



**EMS/Rescues**

**5,379**



**Fires/Service /Other**

**4,874**



**BFD & 9-1-1 Employees**

**177**



**Apparatus & Vehicles**

**39**



**Billings Population**

**119,960**



**Service Area ISO Rating**

**3/10**



**Response Area - 91.47 sq miles**

45.72 sq miles (city)  
44.44 sq miles (BUFSA)  
1.31 sq miles (Landfill)





# EMS

The EMS division is currently working on the completion of the CPSM recommendations. We are finishing the development of Mobile Response Teams. These teams have taken many medical calls off the first due Engine Companies: saving fuel and decreasing maintenance issues from wear and tear. The Mobile Response Teams leave them available for other priority calls. This model supports the need for ISO coverage and a possible change to the rating.

The Crisis Response Unit will be implemented with a soft opening on Labor Day. One EMT has been hired for our portion of fulfilling the contract, and another should be hired soon. We hope to work out all the kinks of developing a public-private partnership and the challenges that may arise with implementation and development. Substance Abuse Connect and Rimrock Foundation have been excellent to work with.

We are also anticipating the community's needs, getting ready for an aging population, and the impacts on the fire department and pre-hospital system. This is driving the need for more Paramedics in the Fire Service. We have partnered with MSU City College and have procured funding to support education. The MSU Board of Regents fully supports and understands this critical need. We currently have a new Medical Control Physician. Dr. Whitney Gum has already begun to insert herself into learning our system and has already completed a ride-along with Engine 3. She is a hands-on physician who represents Med Flight and Lockwood Fire Department. Currently, the Billings Fire Department has 37 Paramedics, of which 30 are credentialed, and 5 paramedics are currently in the precepting process. Additionally, 5 Billings firefighters are supported by the MSU Board of Regents to attend the Sprint Paramedic program through MSU City College mentioned above. This would give the Billings Fire Department a total of 40 credentialed Paramedics. The Billings Fire Department is now included in accreditation areas of hospital programs that are directly impacted by pre-hospital care.





# Mobile Response Teams

The new MRT program has proven wildly successful since its inception. The program is geared toward taking pressure off our engine and truck companies to keep them at a higher state of readiness, more efficient multi-company training and reduce wear and tear and fuel consumption.

The squads comprise one captain and one paramedic for a two-person team that runs 24 hours per day and 365 days per year. All personnel meeting these qualifications are assigned to the squads on a rotating basis to reduce “burnout.” The squad’s primary mission is to capture high-acuity EMS calls with our private partner, American Medical Response. AMR responds to low-acuity calls without the help of BFD. In addition, all personnel are considered dual roles, meaning they are suppression ready and equipped to help with all other calls from fires to rescues to HAZMAT, provided they are not tied to a medical call.

In terms of call volume, Squad One has responded to approximately 1,600 calls since December 1, 2022, with an anticipated 2,500 to 3,000 total responses for the calendar year. Squad Two began service on July 10th and will service the west end as it is assigned to fire station five. We anticipate Squad Two responding to just as many as Squad One, if not more. Also, before the program's implementation, Engines One and Two responded to Engine Six’s area approximately 10% of their time in any calendar year. With Squad One assigned to the east end of town, that number has been dramatically reduced to less than 1%, keeping all east-end units in their response areas significantly more often. We anticipate Squad Two providing the same benefits for the west end. On another note, it has taken until the end of June to receive our intended vehicle for this program, the smaller, more agile Ford Interceptor. The smaller SUV should produce the desired results in fuel consumption rated at 20 miles/gal. Until recently, we have been using the original 2012 Ford F550, which has a gas mileage of 6 miles/gal. compared to a large fire engine rated at 5 miles/gal.

Lastly, the crews' morale has increased considerably as they have witnessed firsthand the benefits of our new program. Overall, we are ecstatic about the results for our community and look forward to continued success.

## MRT Stats

Call count Squad 1: 1,383

Call Count Squad 2: 182

Average Response Time: 6:18





# Training

## Highlights:

- 10 Person recruit academy (12 if you include Lockwood)
- 6 Person Officer Development Program (ODP)
- 6-Person Engineer Development Program (EDP)
- Drone Pilots

## ISO Numbers:

Facility Training (individual employee hours):  
3882.5 Total hours-161.77 days

Company Training (individual employee hours):  
5106.11 Total Hours- 212.75 days

## Special Programs:

ODP- 6 Members completed, 140 hours, 840 hours.  
EDP- 6 members enrolled, 5 completed 80 hours,  
480 total hours.

Drone Pilot BPD and BFD: 32 hours, 4 BFD pilots  
for a total of 128 hours.

Development Program (individual employee) totals:  
1,448 Hours

## Recruit class:

10 members enrolled, 10 Completed. 480 hours per member,  
4,800 total hours  
Recruit Program total: 4,800 hours

## Wildland training:

Wildland Refresher: 195 hours  
Pack test (3 miles, 45lbs pack under 45 minutes): 96 personnel



# Hazmat

In June, The Montana Regional Hazmat Teams, of which the Billings Fire Department is a member, completed a nearly five-year-long project to supply each of the six state hazmat teams with a state-of-the-art remote Unmanned Aerial System, otherwise known as a drone. On behalf of the six regional hazmat teams, a \$300,000 Homeland Security Grant was secured by the Billings Fire Department to license and train FAA-



certified drone pilots and purchase six DJI Matrice 300 drones equipped with a high-quality optical camera, a thermal imager, and an optional hazardous materials monitor. The drone aircraft and pilots are positioned in Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, and Missoula.

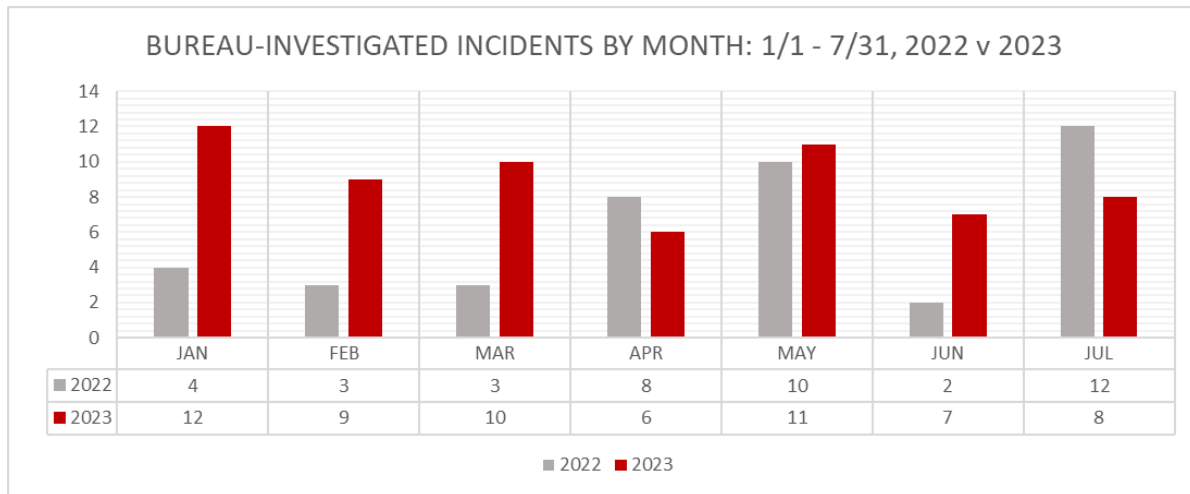
The purpose of this program is to have the ability to rapidly access potential hazmat scenes, such as the recent railroad derailment near Billings, and assess those scenes for hazards such as fire, trapped victims, and hazardous materials. Additionally, the UAS aircraft has been used to search for stranded boaters on the Yellowstone River and guide first responders to the victims in the dark. Also, the Billings Fire Department's drones and pilots have assisted the Billings Police Department, mapped changes in the condition of the BBWA water canal, and searched for a missing mountain biker lost in the uneven terrain surrounding the rims on Billings' West End. The drone will likely also see service sizing up wildfires, doing damage surveys on buildings, and providing additional safety and situational awareness at structure fires.

In order for the Billings Fire Department to obtain grant funding and start this statewide program, Engineer Mark Solberg had to author a Civil Rights/Civil Liberty Plan for the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that citizens' civil rights would not be violated through the use of grant funds. Additionally, significant amounts of research went into selecting an aircraft that could meet the flight time and payload requirements of these missions. This process was significantly slowed by the outbreak of COVID-19 however, Engineer Solberg was finally able to obtain the necessary clearances and paperwork with DHS and secure a vendor willing to travel to each regional hazmat team and train their personnel. The UAS program is one more example where the Billings Fire Department utilizes the latest technology to deliver outstanding customer services to the citizens of Billings and those who visit here. For more information on the Billings Fire Department's drone program, please visit our web link at: <https://www.billingsmt.gov/2986/UAS>





# Fire Prevention Bureau



The Fire Prevention Bureau has investigated 63 incidents so far this year compared to 42 incidents last year at this time.



To date for 2023, The Fire Prevention Bureau has conducted 543 inspections.



The Fire Prevention Bureau has processed 42 fire protection plans in total. 21 Fire Alarm plans. 20 Fire Sprinkler plans. 1 Clean Agent plan.



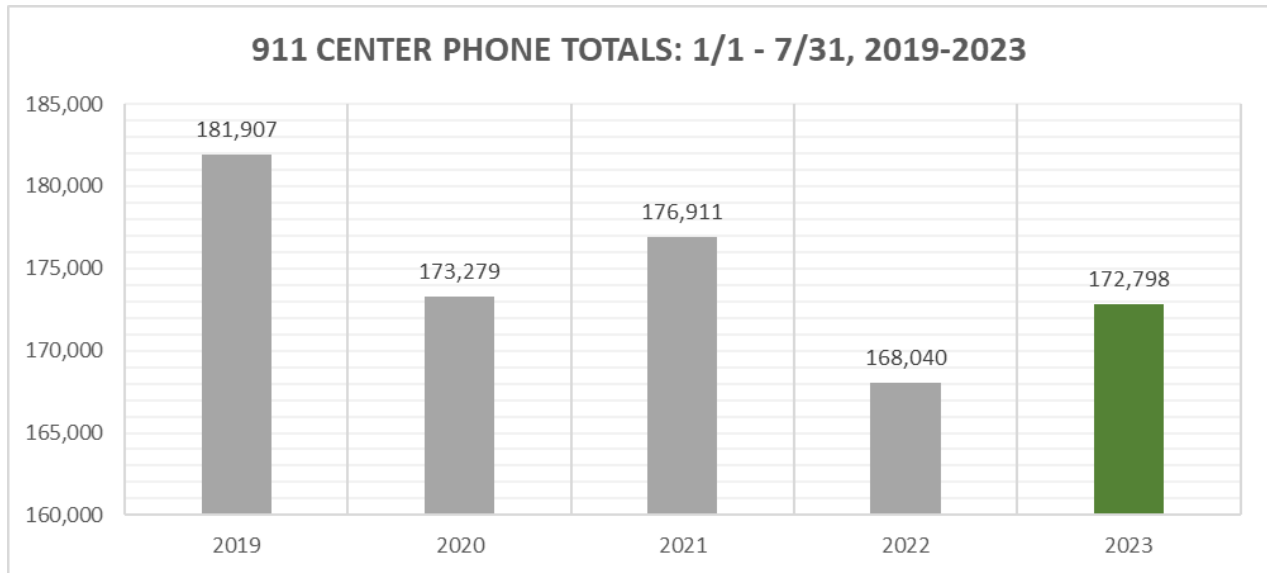
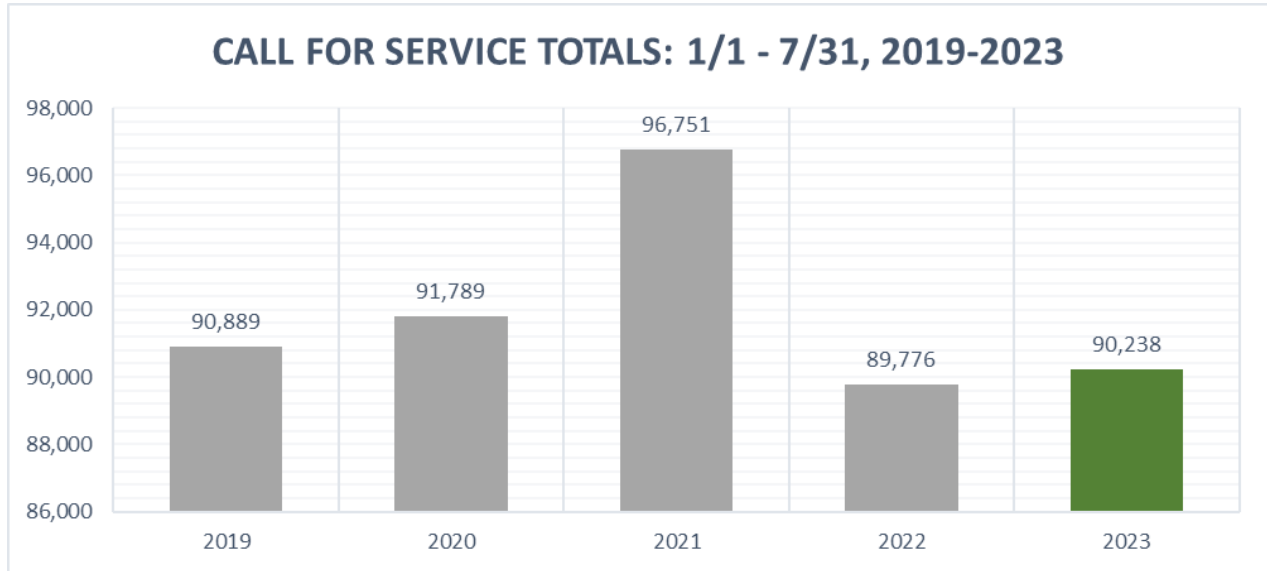


# 9-1-1 Center

- We continue to hire new personnel at a steady rate. We are finding great success using the NEOGOV program but continue to struggle with applications showing up for interviews and demonstrating competency in pre-employment testing. To date, we are at 70% staffing. We hope to achieve 100% staffing, reenergize full capacity call taking and dispatching, and then proceed to over-hiring to accommodate anticipated retirements and resignations.
- Supervisors have assumed a much-modified tasking and including scheduling that brings us closer to a 24/7/365 model of applied supervision.
- Implementation of the new city radio system is ongoing and on-schedule with a timeline of full implementation and use in January of 24.
- We continue to prioritize medical calls using existing protocols and continue to work towards the refinement of that process.
- We have purchased and over the next 12-18 months will implement advanced FIRE and POLICE priority dispatch protocols (similar to those medical calls already prioritized). This will benefit the training of new employees (using one standard program for all call-taking and priority dispatch activities instead of 4) and is anticipated to cut our initial onboarding and training time in half. In addition, this will include a substantial revision to FIRE and POLICE dispatch procedures that also offer expanded prioritization options for what amounts to more demand for resources than what resources are actually present and available.
- 911 Phone handling system is coming up on expiration and will be required to be updated in the next FY or so. We are exploring this system and working with the vendor to establish a timeline and compatibility issues with some of our existing systems.
- Our top 3 challenges include an increasing volume of phone calls and requests for emergency services and adjusting our staffing to try and meet this demand efficiently, refining and expanding the matrix of prioritization for the daily and moment by moment prioritization of fire and medical and law enforcement calls to limited (and sometime no) available resources, and continually training new staff on evolving protocol requirements that are present in such a dynamic and complicated environment.



# 9-1-1 Center





# Therapy Dog Program

Deputy Fire Marshal Becky Biggins is the handler for Winston. Winston is currently in training and will be a fully operational Therapy Dog soon. Winston will be the first K-9 in Billings Fire Department. He will be serving the 1st responders of Billings Fire Department to aid in mental health and also serving the public to help teach fire safety.

A study out of UCLA Health on therapy animals showed the following benefits of adding a therapy dog program:

- **Physical benefits:** Lowered blood pressure, breathing slows in those who are anxious, release of hormones like phenylethylamine that regulates overall mood and can help with depression.
- **Mental benefits:** Helps people relax and decompress, provides comfort, and is a happy distraction. Petting animals also promoted the release of serotonin, prolactin, and oxytocin. These hormones all play a part in elevating mood.





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