In reference to concerns brought up in the public comment portion of the August meeting of the joint Fire Board meeting, the Edwardsburg Fire Dept. has conducted a comprehensive review of its response and operations at the structure fire on July 24th, 2021 at the Barbara Dempsey residence on Meadow Drive in Ontwa Twp.

This review included a report of Cass County central dispatch records, time stamps and radio logs, as well as interviews with Edwardsburg Fire personnel on scene of the incident. Our documented response times refute the claim of “it took 20 minutes to get there” and are within established fire service norms for volunteer depts.

**Cass Central Dispatch (911 center) received phone call : 15:29:29 (3:29:29 PM)**

**Central Dispatch alerts Edwardsburg Fire of the call : 15:30:36 (3:30:26 PM)**

**Edwardsburg Fire Engine 3-24 responds enroute : 15:38:31 (3:38:31 PM)**

**Edwardsburg Fire Engine 3-24 on scene : 15:43:44 (3:43:44 PM)**

This shows a time of just under **8 minutes** for a crew to respond to station from their homes to the Fire station, don their fire gear and get into apparatus, and a **5-minute** time frame to drive from the station to the incident. While we believe the on-scene time stamp of our first truck was missed by dispatch by up to 2 minutes (putting us on scene at 15:41) either way we stand by our 11 to 13 minute response time. (See attached table for fire service standards)

Our review also concluded that all Edwardsburg Fire on-scene operations were followed to department SOG’s (standard operating guidelines). Our SOG’s are written to meet NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) principles and are reviewed periodically by our insurance underwriter, VFIS (Volunteer Firemen’s Insurance Services), for conformity to professional standards.

Of particular concern at public comment was the shutoff of the natural gas supply to the building on fire. It was determined that the gas to the house **WAS** shut off by on-scene personnel at the gas meter. It was also heard on the radio log the IC (incident commander) asking dispatch to “notify utilities” which means to contact electric and gas companies to come to scene to confirm shut off. Dispatch asked IC if “we needed SEMCO” for gas shutoff, and IC responded he “would get back to them on that”. Subsequently the electric company was dispatched, but the gas company was not. We have determined this was an oversight on command’s part for not getting back with dispatch to ensure SEMCO was dispatched. The gas companies do have an involved procedure at any fire scene to verify that their gas service was not the cause of the fire. While we take responsibility for not notifying them, with the gas being shut off at the meter at no point were the on-scene personnel or the adjacent public in any greater danger by the lack of gas company personnel at the incident. However, to assure this omission doesn’t happen again, we plan to incorporate utility notification into existing SOG’s (there is currently no SOG that outlines utility shut off) and to conduct more robust IC trainings.

Another concern by the public was that someone on scene prior to the Fire Department’s arrival stated that this call was dispatched as a trailer fire and that the wrong trucks were dispatched as a result. Reviews of the run slip and radio log verify that the call went out as a “garden tractor on fire in garage”. Regardless, the Edwardsburg Fire response to a trailer fire is the same as to a house fire. Furthermore, our investigation concludes that at no point was there an active member of the Edwardsburg Fire Dept. on scene before the first arriving Edwardsburg engine crew of 4. Ms. Bourne was adamant the person saying this was a first responder. Not only did we conclude it could not have been an Edwardsburg fire fighter, but also ruled out neighboring fire departments having someone on-scene before us. One possible explanation is that these erroneous statements could have been from someone that we in the fire service call a “fire buff”. Many “fire buffs” have scanners/radios and it has been our experience that on major calls, these people show up to see the action. It’s possible that one of these “enthusiasts” was mistaken for an Edwardsburg fire fighter. Anything this person may have said falls outside the purview of the Edwardsburg Fire Dept.

In reference to the Edwardsburg Fire becoming a paid, staffed department, leadership of the department has considered this for many years. The funds needed to have a 24-hour, paid, NFPA-compliant staff would require an estimated minimum of 6 to 7 times our current budget; an estimated additional $1.5 million dollars. With our current population and tax base, it is our position that a full time department is not yet financially achievable. Having said that, it is our recommendation that the Fire Board hire a consulting firm to study the protection needs of our community. We are open to any increased funding ideas the Joint Fire Board comes up with, and if it is the wish of our stakeholders to become a staffed department and are willing to pay for it, we are in a great position asset wise (apparatus, building, personnel) to scale our operations up quickly.

To close, we are always sorry to see someone in our community lose their home to fire. We did the best we could, with what we have to prevent the loss of property on July 24th. There is nothing we did, or did not do that would have made the outcome of that day any different. The most important thing is that no one was hurt or killed, Ms. Dempsey or any firefighters. The dedicated men and women of the Edwardsburg Fire Department are always striving to improve and we would like to thank Ms. Dempsey and Ms. Bourne for their concerns as we believe by working together with the public, we can better understand their expectations of us. Rest assure that we at Edwardsburg Fire Dept. want to improve our community, after all we and our families live here too.

**NFPA 1720, *Standard for the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations to the public by volunteer fire Departments*:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Demand Zonea** | **Demographics** | **Minimum** **Staff to Respondb** | **Response** **Time (minutes)c** | **Meets** **Objective (%)** |
| Urban area | >1000 people/mi2 | 15 | 9 | 90 |
| Suburban area | 500–1000 people/mi2 | 10 | 10 | 80 |
| **Rural area** | **<500 people/mi2** | **6** | **14** | **80** |
| Remote area | Travel distance ≥ 8 mi | 4 | Directly dependent on travel distance | 90 |
| Special risks | Determined by AHJ | Determined by AHJ based on risk | Determined by AHJ | 90 |

* Edwardsburg Demand area is considered Rural- hi lighted in Red