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## Colorado Fire Service Profile July, 2004

There are three classifications of fire departments in the United States: Career, Combination, and Volunteer. At the time the 2004 Colorado fire service census was performed, there were an estimated 391 fire departments<sup>1</sup> in the state, as follows:

Department Classification	Number	Percent of Total
Career	41	10.5%
Combination	118	30.2%
Volunteer	232	59.3%
Total	391	100.0%

Unfortunately, these terms are not consistent by definition across the country. The following is how we have chosen to define the terms in Colorado:

**Career** – Fire departments that have 100% of their members in full or part-time paid positions are classified as “career” departments.

**Combination** – Fire departments that have any combination of full-time, paid-on-call and/or volunteer members are classified as “combination” departments. The combination fire department may have one or more full-time staff, but rely upon paid-on-call or volunteer firefighters to complement the fire department. The full-time staff may be chief officers, or even fire prevention personnel that perform fire suppression duties when an alarm is received. Combination fire departments can be further defined as “mostly career” or “mostly volunteer”, as follows:

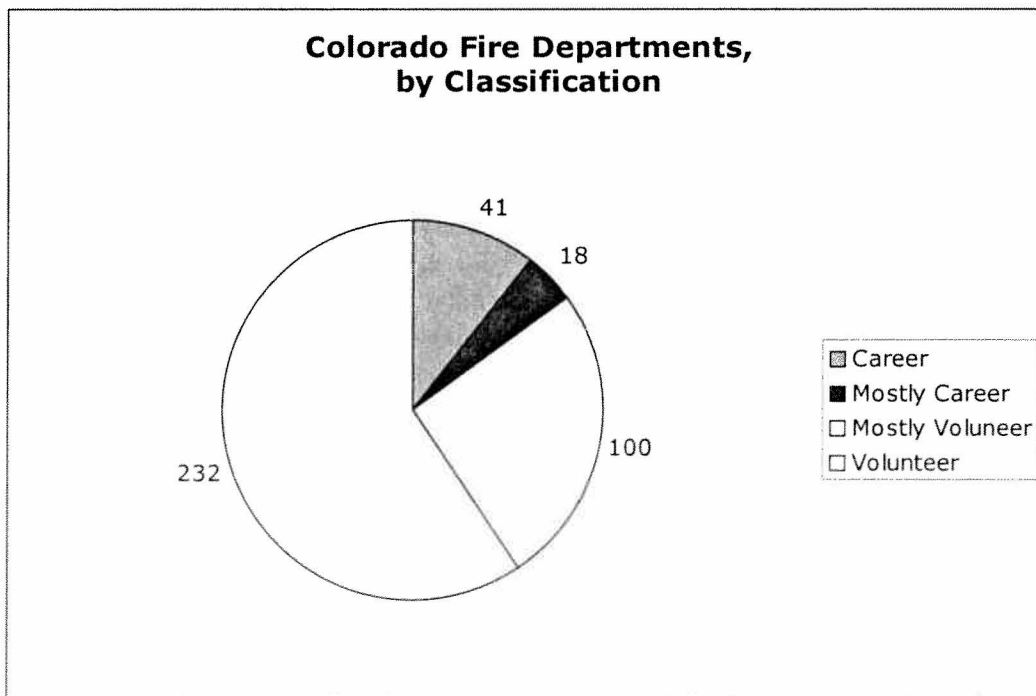
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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this report, a fire department is defined as an organization established and operating for the primary purpose of providing fire protection. A fire department employs full-time and/or volunteer firefighters, and maintains at least one piece of fire apparatus. Included in this definition are fire protection districts, municipal fire departments, non-governmental volunteer fire departments, industrial fire departments, military fire departments, and other-type fire departments. Not included in the definition of “fire department” are public or private wildfire hand crews; industrial fire brigades that do not maintain fire apparatus; or sheriffs departments (whether or not the sheriff provides fire protection or maintains fire apparatus).

- A. Mostly Career – Combination fire departments that are comprised of 51 to 99% career firefighters, are classified as “mostly career” departments. Of the 118 combination fire departments identified above, a total of 18 (15.3%) are classified as “mostly career” departments.
- B. Mostly Volunteer – Combination fire departments that are comprised of 1 to 50% career firefighters are classified as “mostly volunteer” departments. Of the 118 combination fire departments identified above, a total of 100 (84.7%) are classified as “mostly volunteer” departments.

A total of 18 of these “mostly volunteer” departments (18%) have only one career firefighter, which is often the fire chief. An additional 12 fire departments (12%) have only two career firefighters. In fact, a total of 55 of these “mostly volunteer” departments (55%) have five or less career firefighters.

**Volunteer** – Fire departments that are comprised entirely of members that do not receive compensation are classified as “volunteer” departments. Volunteer firefighters may receive compensation in the form of a length of service retirement program (LSOP) and insurance. In some instances, volunteer firefighters receive a small stipend for such things as response to fire calls, training, and/or clothing allowance.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> NOTE: Under federal guidelines for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program, if a volunteer fire department provides stipends to their members or provides “pay-on-call” for their members, the department is considered to be combination.

NOTE: Table 1 shows the breakdown of these fire departments, by classification, based on the population of the community served.

## Type of Fire Department

As part of the Colorado fire service census, fire departments were asked to identify the "type" of department they are, from the following list.

Type of Department	Number	Percent of Total
County	5	1.3%
Department of Defense	7	1.8%
Fire Authority	13	3.3%
Fire Protection District <sup>3</sup>	245	62.7%
Industrial/Private	9	2.3%
Municipal	41	10.5%
Non-Governmental VFD	53	13.6%
Other Special District	8	2.0%
Other	10	2.6%
Total	391	100.0%

Terms for fire department types are not consistent by definition across the country. The following is how we have chosen to define the terms in Colorado.

**County Fire Department** – an agency or organization that has a formally recognized arrangement with a county to provide fire suppression to all or part of the geographical area of the county. Note: In reality, a county fire department may actually be a county improvement district providing fire protection or a county-wide fire authority. Examples of county fire departments in Colorado are: Las Animas-Bent County Fire Department, and Costilla County Fire Department.

**Department of Defense (DoD) Fire Department** – The Department of Defense (DoD) generally operates their own fire departments on active duty military installations. Examples in Colorado are the U.S. Air Force Academy Fire Department, and Fort Carson Fire Department.

**Fire Authority** – Fire authorities are created by intergovernmental agreement between two or more political subdivisions of the State (city, county, fire district, or other governing body), which outlines the governance, funding and operation of the authority. Generally, fire authority agreements functionally consolidate the fire

<sup>3</sup> In cases where a fire protection district (or county improvement district or metropolitan district providing fire protection) exists as a taxing entity only, but operates one or more "independent" fire departments, the district was not counted, but the independent fire department(s) were. In order to be considered an independent fire department (where there is more than one fire department within a district), the fire department must have a separate fire chief, separate facility/facilities, and separate apparatus.

departments previously operated by the individual entities. Examples are the Poudre Fire Authority, and West Metro Fire Rescue Authority.

**Fire Protection District** – means a special district, duly constituted under Colorado law, which provides protection against fire by any available means and which may supply ambulance and emergency medical and rescue services. Examples of fire protection districts are: Arvada Fire Protection District, and Boulder Rural Fire Protection District.

**Industrial/Private Fire Department** – Some major industries may have their own fire department because of the special type of manufacturing they perform. Examples of Industrial/Private fire departments are: Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company, Rocky Flats Fire Department, and Platte River Fire/Rescue.

**Municipal Fire Department** – The duly organized fire department of a city or town; such as the City of Aurora Fire Department, and the Castle Rock Fire and Rescue Department.

**Non-Governmental Volunteer Fire Department (VFD)** – A private organization created to provide fire protection within a fixed geographical area. Non-governmental VFD's may receive financial support from a local government, but are not formally recognized as an agency or organization of the local government. Examples of non-governmental volunteer fire departments are: Karval Community Volunteer Fire Department, and the Tri-County Volunteer Fire Department.

**Other Special District** – means a metropolitan district or county improvement district providing fire protection services, and duly constituted under Colorado law. Examples are: Holly Volunteer Fire & Ambulance District, and Pueblo West Fire Department.

**Other** – an agency or organization that has a formally recognized arrangement with a federal, State, local, or tribal authority (city, county, fire district, town, or other governing body) to provide fire suppression to a facility or a fixed geographical area. Examples are: Eisenhower Tunnel Fire Department, Ute Mountain Fire/EMS, and Gunnison - Crested Butte Regional Airport Fire Department.

## **Career and Volunteer Firefighters**

There are an estimated 15,044 firefighters in Colorado, of which approximately 9,558 (63.5%) are volunteer and 5,486 (36.5%) are career.

- The 41 career fire departments employ 3,734 firefighters, or 68.1% of the career firefighters in the state.
- The 232 volunteer fire departments have a combined total of 5,531 volunteer firefighters (57.9% of all the volunteer firefighters in the state).

## **Some Interesting Facts**

- The 41 career fire departments protect about 58.8% of the State's resident population. These departments also serve approximately 2,922 square miles in land area with 184 fire stations (for an average of one fire station every 16 square miles).
- There are approximately 910 fire stations in Colorado. Of these 184 are operated by career fire departments, 333 are operated by combination fire departments, and 393 are operated by volunteer fire departments.
- The largest career fire department in the state (in terms of the number of firefighters) is Denver, which has 909 career firefighters. The largest combination fire department is West Metro Fire Rescue, which has 303 career and 12 volunteer firefighters. The largest volunteer fire department is Evergreen, with 90 volunteer firefighters.
- The 232 volunteer fire departments protect approximately 13.9% of the State's resident population.

## **List of Colorado Fire Departments**

To view the list of Colorado fire departments, or to search for a specific agency go to: [www.csermp.com](http://www.csermp.com).

**Table 1  
Department Type, by Community Size**

Population of Community	All Career		Mostly Career		Mostly Volunteer		All Volunteer		Total	
	Number Depts	Percent	Number Depts	Percent	Number Depts	Percent	Number Depts	Percent	Number Depts	Percent
250,000 - or more	3	7%	1	6%	0	0%	0	0%	4	1%
100,000 - 249,999	5	12%	1	6%	1	1%	0	0%	7	2%
50,000 - 99,000	7	17%	2	11%	3	3%	0	0%	12	3%
25,000 - 49,999	2	5%	6	33%	7	7%	2	1%	17	4%
10,000 - 24,999	5	12%	4	22%	34	34%	11	5%	54	14%
5,000 - 9,999	4	10%	1	6%	24	24%	25	11%	54	14%
2,500 - 4,999	1	2%	2	11%	11	11%	45	19%	59	15%
Under 2,500	14	34%	1	6%	20	20%	149	64%	184	47%
Total	41	100%	18	100%	100	100%	232	100%	391	100%

Type of department is broken into four categories. All-career departments are comprised of 100% career firefighters. Mostly-career departments are comprised of 51 to 99% career firefighters, while mostly-volunteer departments are comprised of 1 to 50% career firefighters. All-volunteer departments are comprised of 100% volunteer firefighters.

NOTE: The "Under 2,500" category includes three military fire departments which did not disclose their resident population protected.

Source: Colorado Fire Service Census - 2004 (June 22, 2004)