



Colorado Department of Public Safety
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Colorado Fire Service Profile November, 2005

There are three classifications of fire departments in the United States: Career, Combination, and Volunteer. According to information obtained through the Colorado State Emergency Resource Mobilization Program (CSERMP) database, as of November 25, 2005, there are an estimated 395 fire departments¹ in the state, as follows:

Department Classification	Number	Percent of Total
Career	45	11.4%
<u>Combination</u>		
Mostly Career	13	3.3%
Mostly Volunteer	92	23.3%
Volunteer	245	62.0%
Total	395	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

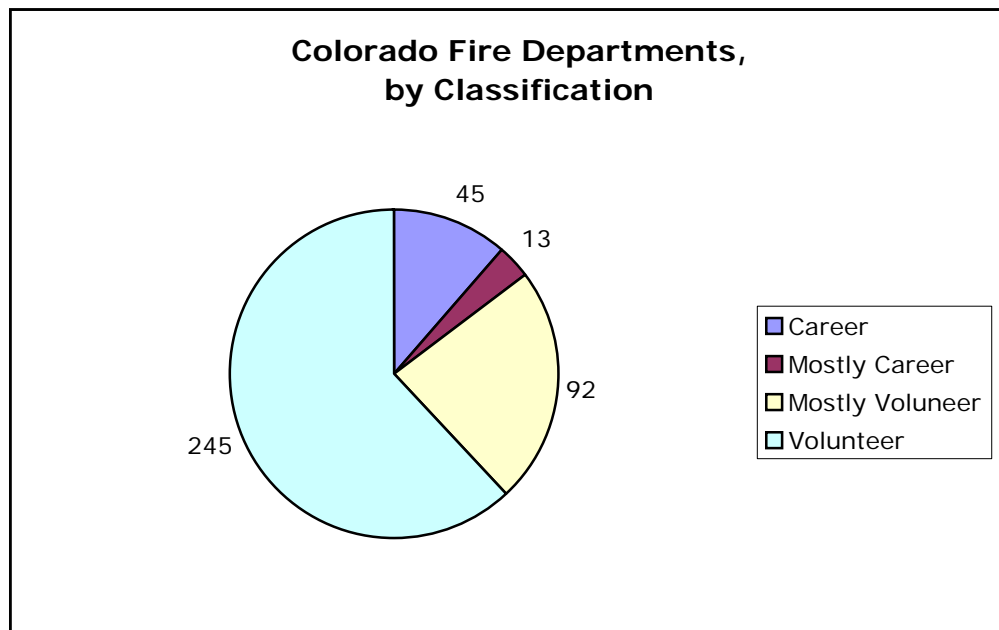
¹ For the purpose of this report, a fire department is defined as an organization established and operating for the primary purpose of providing fire protection. A fire department employs full-time and/or volunteer firefighters, and maintains at least one piece of fire apparatus. Included in this definition 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).

suppression duties when an alarm is received. Combination fire departments can be further defined as “mostly career” or “mostly volunteer”, as follows:

- A. Mostly Career – Combination fire departments that are comprised of 51 to 99% career firefighters, are classified as “mostly career” departments. Of the 105 combination fire departments identified above, a total of 13 (12.4%) 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 105 combination fire departments identified above, a total of 92 (87.6%) are classified as “mostly volunteer” departments.

A total of 17 of these “mostly volunteer” departments (18%) have only one career firefighter, which is often the fire chief. An additional 11 fire departments (12%) have only two career firefighters. In fact, a total of 46 of these “mostly volunteer” departments (50%) 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.²



² 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 State Emergency Resource Mobilization Program, fire departments were asked to identify the “type” of department they are, from the following list.

Type of Department	Number	Percent of Total
County	4	1.0%
Department of Defense	7	1.8%
Fire Authority	12	3.0%
Fire Protection District ³	248	62.8%
Industrial/Private	9	2.3%
Municipal	49	12.4%
Non-Governmental VFD	50	12.7%
Other Special District	8	2.0%
Other	8	2.0%
Total	395	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

³ 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.

authority. Generally, fire authority agreements functionally consolidate the fire 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 14,990 firefighters in Colorado, of which approximately 9,450 (63%) are volunteer and 5,540 (36%) are career.

- The 45 career fire departments employ 4,229 firefighters, or 76.3% of the career firefighters in the state.
- The 245 volunteer fire departments have a combined total of 5,596 volunteer firefighters (59.0% of all the volunteer firefighters in the state).

Some Interesting Facts

- The 45 career fire departments protect about 54.3% of the State's resident population. The 245 volunteer fire departments protect approximately 12.4% of the State's resident population.
- 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 the Arvada Fire Protection District, which has 72 career and 80 volunteer firefighters. The largest volunteer fire department is Evergreen, with 90 volunteer firefighters.

List of Colorado Fire Departments

To view the list of Colorado fire departments, or to search for a specific agency go to: www.co-mobilization.org.

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	4	9%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	1%
100,000 - 249,999	6	13%	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%	8	2%
50,000 - 99,000	7	16%	1	8%	3	3%	0	0%	11	3%
25,000 - 49,999	3	7%	5	38%	9	10%	2	1%	19	5%
10,000 - 24,999	5	11%	4	31%	30	33%	15	6%	54	14%
5,000 - 9,999	5	11%	1	8%	21	23%	25	10%	52	13%
2,500 - 4,999	2	4%	1	8%	11	12%	46	19%	60	15%
Under 2,500	13	29%	1	8%	16	17%	157	64%	187	47%
Total	45	100%	13	100%	92	100%	245	100%	395	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.