

# WHY CAN'T FELTON FIRE RELY ON VOLUNTEERS?

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Volunteer firefighters are a vital part of our rural communities, providing important emergency services and support. With a volunteer model, certain criteria must be assured:

- Are there enough active, trained volunteers?
- Are volunteers available during the day?
- Is the call volume manageable for current volunteers?
- Are backup resources readily available?

The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) report from July 25, 2025 identified:

- Declining volunteer availability
- Increased call volume and complexity
- Gaps in reliable response
- Growing risk to public safety without consistent staffing

According to National Fire Protection Assoc. research (nfpa.org/news, 11-Feb-2026)\*\*, the U.S. volunteer fire service has lost nearly a quarter of its members since 2008, while call volume over that period has increased about 70%, largely due to high training requirements, economic pressures, aging populations, and increased time demands, straining rural and suburban departments. This leaves the remaining volunteers saddled with an ever-increasing workload and fewer resources to address it.

While other agencies may still rely solely on volunteers, the conditions that support a volunteer model are no longer consistently present in Felton.

- Geography and call patterns vary
- Staffing models vary
- What works in one area does not automatically transfer to another

In a Western Confluence Group report (3/17/26), former chief and current project manager, Russ Kane, referenced reorganizing FFPD to paid firefighters supplemented by volunteers:

*“With 900 calls, crews are often managing training, inspections, and maintenance alongside emergency responses, leaving them ‘running on fumes’ if staffing is not increased as call volume grows.”*

*Improvement “of the Felton Fire Protection District is both viable and sustainable. It preserves local governance, strengthens operational readiness, and aligns with recognized fire service standards.”*



Volunteers are important, valued and appreciated, but they can no longer be the only line of response.

**\*\* National Fire Prevention Association Journal, Feb. 11, 2026**

The National Fire Prevention Association offers a thoughtful discussion of the challenges in volunteerism faced by fire departments nationwide\*. A deeper dive into the issue has led us to believe that, in addition to its committed (and greatly appreciated!) volunteers, Felton needs a full-time staff in order to continue providing the emergency services we all expect.

We are not alone. Statistics, based upon NFPA research, report a loss of 12,000 volunteer firefighters nationwide since 2008, coupled with a 70% increase of calls during the same period.

Felton Fire relies on over two thousand hours of volunteer time each month to maintain current levels of service - that's a monthly commitment of roughly 100 hours for each volunteer. That's a lot to ask in today's economic climate and often leads to burnout.

At the same time, state and federal regulations are increasingly stringent. Certification at the beginning level requires 700 hours of training, and effective response depends on experienced professionals with more advanced training and certifications.

While volunteers will certainly continue to be an important element of emergency response, Felton deserves emergency response led by a team of professionals who can coordinate and deliver the service we expect from Felton Fire.

\* <https://www.nfpa.org/news-blogs-and-articles/nfpa-journal/2026/02/11/volunteer-fire-service-crisis>



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