We Don't Patrol

Believe it or not, we try to avoid using lights and sirens as much as possible because of the dangers it creates for other drivers on the roads. When you see an ambulance or a fire engine driving around town, chances are they are responding to a "Code 2" call.

Code 2 calls are non-life-threatening emergencies or calls for service, and they are about 70% of our total call volume. If someone falls and has no one to help them back up, we send a crew to assist them. Law enforcement often requests that we respond to incidents where someone may need a medical evaluation. And while we don't rescue cats out of trees, any time we save baby ducks from storm drains, we also go Code 2.

We only turn on lights and sirens for "Code 3" calls (and occasionally for groups touring our stations.) When the lights and sirens go on, we need drivers to pull to the right and stop. It means the call we are going on could be a life-or-death situation.

So we don't patrol like police officers. If you see us out, chances are we are taking care of someone. If you are out driving and you see lights and hear sirens, please pull over to the right and stop; someone's life depends on it. And if you're still wondering: yes, we have the ability to change some red lights to green if we need to.

Seconds Matter

The unthinkable happens for us every day: someone's heart stops, a baby isn't breathing, a home catches fire, or a serious car accident occurs. When a call is life or death, when seconds matter, we turn on our lights and sirens, and we respond. We call these situations "Code 3" calls, and we have national standards to measure our response time on these critical calls.

From the time we are dispatched, we have one minute to get dressed and in the vehicle; we have four minutes to drive to the scene of the call. In 2018, we met this standard 35% of the time in our community. If a fire truck from Station 5 has to respond to help out in Station 1's area that means another fire truck will have to travel to Station 5's area should an emergency occur. Throughout the day, our resources are pulled out of their areas to help out with emergencies elsewhere, causing a chain reaction of response delays all over our service area.
New Ambulances

GJ/FD ambulances experience extreme wear and tear with the use they are seeing. More ambulances were in shops for unplanned maintenance. Because of this, the department decided to move to a heavier-duty ambulance to better withstand increasing call volumes. In July, 2018, the first of three new grant-funded ambulances arrived and went into service. These new ambulances are larger and better designed to offer safety for patients and providers.

Station 1 is staffed with 10 people running a fire truck, two ambulances, a medical officer, and a Station Chief. The crew are specially trained and equipped for technical rope rescues. Frequently used to rescue climbers, hikers, bikers, and tourists, this equipment and personnel are centrally located in downtown.

Station 2 is our busiest station and houses eight people running an engine and two ambulances. On average the crew responds to calls more than 20 times every day. They are specially trained and equipped for desert rescue. Two-axle vehicles provide access for ATV and motorcycle accidents in the desert north of town.

Station 3 is our oldest station (built in 1975). Six crew members live here, running an ambulance and a fire truck. The crew is specially trained and equipped to respond to emergencies involving hazardous material. As this designated hazmat response team, these crews provide hazmat services throughout western Colorado.

Station 4 houses three to four people at a time. This crew primarily runs a fire engine, but are also certified wildland firefighters. A large brush truck is located in the station, and the crew frequently use this engine in the spring and summer to respond to wildfires.

Station 5 is our newest additional station, built in 2004. Four people staff one fire engine. With limited access to fire hydrants, and the high-risk fuels and terrain in the area, Station 5 also houses a water tender and a small brush truck. The tender is able to carry 2,000 gallons of water at a time to remote locations.

Rosevale Fire

Compared to recent wildland fires burning across our country the Rosevale fire was small and quickly contained. However, this fire highlights the potential for catastrophic wildland fires within Mesa County.

Rosevale Road is a narrow drive through rustic homes surrounded by tall trees and dense brush. Houses vary from newer stucco construction to older homes with wood shingle roofs surrounded by numerous outbuildings and rusty cars parked in open fields. Several properties were carpeted with a dense layer of weeds, bushes, and leaves falling from the abundant trees.

On April 2nd, 2018, these conditions, and warm winds gusting at 20-25 miles an hour turned a simple attempt at tractor maintenance into a fast-growing brush fire requiring 363 homes to be evacuated.

The first calls to the Grand Junction Regional Communication Center started at 7:27 p.m. on April 2nd. Over 45 calls came in during the first ten minutes of the fire. More than 60 fire and police vehicles responded to contain the fire and evacuate residents.

The Rosevale Fire represents fire conditions present all over Mesa County and reminds us that fire safety is a community-wide responsibility.

The Rosevale Fire began at a property on the 2500 block of D Road. The responsible person was attempting to fix a fire on a riding lawnmower with an open flame when winds spread the fire to nearby grass.

Open burning or the use of sparking machinery during dangerous fire conditions can easily cause a fire to grow out of control. Check weather conditions at www.weather.gov before burning.
Firework Ban

On July 4th, to the shock and fear of residents and fire crews, several neighborhoods in Grand Junction were unexpectedly quarantined. A fire had gone beyond control, and it was a story too familiar to the residents. It was the shock of a lifetime. The causes are not yet clear, but there is a potential fire danger and steps must be taken to actively prevent fires. In Mesa County, there was a social pressure to avoid using fireworks, and to temporarily clean up the community site. When driving, folks made sure chains for trailers were secured. And we have people take extra precautions, when working with machinery outside. Despite the conditions, being much worse for fires, in 2018, there were nearly 20 fewer fires in Grand Junction than the previous year. Fire is everyone's fight, and we are proud to be a community that puts safety first.

Keep Your Home Safe From Wildland Fires

When wildfires threaten neighborhoods, firefighters have to make choices about which homes are suitable and which aren’t. Often, the number of homes in danger far exceeds the number of fire crews available. These fires burns a lot of space around homes to make those difficult choices, frequently spending no more than a passing glance to make a call on a home. Is your property ready?

Defensible space makes your home fire resistant through landscaping and maintenance around the immediate area of your home. If you do this work, before a fire ever happens. The first step involves focusing on the immediate zone within 0-5 feet of the structure: clear out shrubs, trees, woodpiles, and flammable materials. If you can walk easily around your home, the crew can’t either. These low-lying materials also greatly increase fire’s ability to spread quickly to your home.

Between 5-30 feet around your home, ensure there is plenty of space between trees and shrubs. Ensuring all plants and grass are well trimmed and watered can make a huge difference. Trimming tree branches away from your home, and 6-10 feet off the ground also prevents fire from spreading.

Fire Investigation

When smoke is billowing out of a home and flames are licking the eaves, bystanders often ask, “How did the fire start?” The truth is, we won’t get that answer until hours later, if at all. Once the fire is out and the smoke clears, crews still have work to do: using a thermal imaging camera to look for hot spots, removing valuable items from the family, coordinating with victim advocates and Red Cross to provide support for those affected, and conducting a fire investigation.

At GJFD there are two types of investigations: level 1 and level 2. Level 1 investigations are done by the crew on scene. If there are no odd or outstanding circumstances around the fire. A level 2 investigation involves bringing in department members with more training and experience to carefully comb through the scene, document evidence, and conduct witness interviews. Often, a level 2 investigation accompanies a law enforcement investigation. Either way, investigators look at burn patterns and clues to determine where and how the fire started.

Investigation results add to our understanding of how, when, and where fires start. Using this information, we help develop a future with safer building codes, better educated communities, and safer practices for fire crews. Often we are also able to provide immediate closure for families and provide valuable information to insurance and law enforcement agencies.

On June 18th, 2017, Jason Wytuska, Brian Gies, and Brian Lurvey were dispatched to an apartment fire that ultimately resulted in an arson and attempted murder charges. Not only did the crew assist in firefighting, their keen observations, thorough investigation, and professional testimony in court contributed to the successful prosecution of the case. As a result of their work, the defendant in the case was convicted of arson and attempted 1st degree murder charges in August of 2018.
We should really be called, "The Catch-All Department", since we respond to much more than fires. Because of Grand Junction's geographic isolation, our department provides a lot of services for emergencies that just can't wait for a response from Denver or Salt Lake. We offer a regional hazmat and bomb-squad response, with specialty trained crew members. We also offer things like trench, confined space, water, ice, and rope rescue teams.

Notably, last year our hazmat team responded to a number of incidents, but two of the incidents stand out in our memories. The first involved an 18 wheeler that had run off the road and into the river while going through Debeque Canyon. GJFD crews provided a swift water rescue, aided by ropes, to save the driver from the icy waters. Later, a hazmat technician crew responded to contain diesel fuel that was spilling from the truck directly into the river. This involved donning wet and dry suits to haul, place, and secure special absorbent floating booms to contain the spill.

Technicians responded to a separate call to assist local and federal law enforcement agencies who had encountered potentially deadly and illegal drugs. Synthetic materials used to manufacture illegal drugs can be deadly in very small quantities. During these operations it is critical to handle these materials in the safest way possible to prevent serious illness or death from contact. Using special protective equipment and breathing devices, technicians first removed the samples from a home and then began running tests to classify the materials and reduce the risk to police officers handling the criminal investigation.

GJFD employs 18 active hazmat technicians. Coursework to become a Hazmat technician requires two weeks of specialized training. Technicians study chemistry, industrial hazards, case studies; and how to test, identify, and contain dangerous substances.
CITIZENS’ ACADEMY

Change is on the horizon for the GJFD Annual Citizens’ Academy. Last year a group of citizens, with a wide range of life experiences, joined us one night a week for six weeks to get an up-close look at every facet of our department.

Participants get to explore parts of the physical test, use high-tech EMS equipment, and crawl through our training maze to simulate entering a burning building. But we learned that this extended format doesn’t work for many interested in the fire service. Re-named Project Sparks, the new Academy will still teach about all aspects of the Department, but will focus more on hands-on experiences with things like rope rescue, extricating a patient from a car accident, and practicing EMS and firefighting skills. There will also be elements that develop team building and communication skills which are essential to the job. Participants in the revised academy can expect to explore our all-hazards operations over the course of five mornings. The week will end with a skills demonstration day where friends and family are welcome to join in and learn more about GJFD emergency services.

Project Sparks will be a great opportunity for targeted groups to get a personal experience with fire and emergency operations, culture, and job duties. As a department, we hope to use this new format to build a community that is invested in, and familiar with, emergency services from a young age. We also want to provide this type of opportunity to focused groups like young women and minorities that are underrepresented in the fire service as a whole.

For more information on Project Sparks, contact us by e-mail at GJFirePOD@gmail.com or find us on Facebook at @gj0911.

EMS Officer Jamie Kavanaugh is both a remarkable person and employee. His dedication to improving GJFD for the organization, the employees, and the community we serve is above and beyond. Jamie brings his creativity, compassion, and dedication regularly to EMS education and peer support. He is a talented educator and is never too busy to listen, never too overwhelmed to understand. Jamie truly loves his job, the people he works with, and the people he serves. Because of that he is an irreplaceable asset to our department.

Employee of the Year

Promotions

Gustave Hendricks promoted to Deputy Chief

Steve Kollar promoted to Fire Marshall

Michael Cox promoted to Captain

Maple Taylor promoted to Engineer

Brian Gies promoted to Fire Inspector/Investigator

GJFD employees interested in promoting participate in a formal mentorship process to gain experience in their chosen career path. As promoted positions become available, employees that have completed the prerequisites may participate in an assessment center. If not selected employees must maintain eligibility and have the opportunity to perform in an upgraded role to gain additional experience and on-the-job training.
SPARKS THE FIRE DOG

2018 saw the creation of our new Grand Junction Fire Department mascot. Named by our citizens and ready to go; Sparks the fire dog is ready to give out high fives and share life-saving information with children of all ages.

It takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a fire department to create a mascot. When our Community Outreach Team found the denim helmet and deteriorating full rug of a dalmatian in a dusty old box it sparked an idea. A whole lot of blue foam shavings and several months later that idea began to take shape.

There are commercially manufactured dalmatians out there to choose from, but GJFD decided to do things a little differently. We rolled up our sleeves and started from scratch, sketching the exact dalmatian face that represented our department. After carefully exploring and refining our vision, the large wet nose and spots started to come into focus. We assembled a stack of blue insulation foam roughly chopped into the shape of a dog’s noggins. A liberal application of spray glue later we had a solid block of foam and a thin layer of tacky dust everywhere. That’s when the real work started.

Haphazard chopping gave way to careful sanding and bodily contortions while wielding a rotary tool. After hours of toil and sweating behind a protective mask we were looking at the new familiar face of our friend Sparks. There was only one problem, he was blue!

The Grand Junction Fire Department is home to many talented individuals. We have metal workers, carpenters, photographers, and enough linkers to solve any problem. Our ace in the hole is Paramedic Ada Shilcox. Ada can fashion just about anything out of a piece of fabric, including the hide of an oversized dalmatian. After careful planning, a few delays, and a tremendous team effort, our friend Sparks is hereal!

(Above) After accepting suggestions from our Facebook followers and a spirited vote, Sparks was selected as the name of our new GJFD mascot. (Below) Paramedic Ada Shilcox helps construct Sparks.

We often rely on citizens to provide basic care while EMS and fire crews are responding to an emergency call. Often, the heroic actions of citizens before we get there determine the outcome of the call. Last year we recognized seven people for acts of bravery to save a life.

Kimberly Romisch was working at Denny’s when one of her customers began choking on a piece of food. Kimberly immediately began performing abdominal thrusts. When the patient stopped breathing and lost consciousness, Kimberly began CPR. While performing CPR, Kimberly was able to dislodge the food and removed it from the customer’s mouth. The patient was able to breathe again on her own and regained full consciousness as fire department personnel arrived on scene.

Kalib Dillingham was working at Olive Garden when a customer began choking on a piece of food. Another employee began attempting to dislodge the obstruction and Kalib recognized that the technique being used was ineffective. He jumped into action and began performing the abdominal thrusts correctly. After several attempts, he was able to dislodge the food and clear the airway. His actions were directly linked to the successful outcome and recovery of the patient.

Peggi Kendall was working as an employee of City Market and was instrumental in helping save the life of a co-worker who went into cardiac arrest at the store. Peggi in a retired RN and witnessed the cardiac arrest. She calmly evaluated the patient and immediately began effective CPR. After several minutes, PD officers arrived on scene and took over compressions until fire department personnel arrived on scene.

While delivering food to a home, Michael Lawrie noticed a strong smell of natural gas. He could have easily talked himself out of calling 9-1-1 on behalf of a stranger but instead, acted out of direct concern for the person in the apartment. When crews arrived they found deadly levels of carbon monoxide in the home and were able to evacuate the resident and her dog unharmed. If Michael had not had the courage to call, even when he was told not to, this call could have had a tragic ending.

When 6-year-old Amaya saw her friend fall in a canal she sounded the alarm. Kyle Ebert was nearby and heard the commotion. When he investigated, he found multiple people yelling to help the young female who had fallen in. Kyle jumped in and was able to grab the child. However, he was unable to get her out. Paul Mestek stepped in and was able to jump in the water and help get the child out safely. The two men were subsequently rescued by GJFD personnel. All three were recognized for their efforts.
Anyone can visit a fire house, either by scheduling a tour or attending one of our open houses! After all, your taxes pay for our fire stations!

We love sharing these community resources with citizens, families, scout groups, social clubs, and local leaders. Our crews are always happy to offer a hands-on experience, often demonstrating tools and equipment, and interior tours of fire trucks and ambulances. In 2018 over 1,700 people visited our stations to learn about the job, lifestyle, and responsibilities of our crews. We often find that folks see things they never even knew were there!

Every time we go to a fire, we have to come home and get everything clean; that means a special fire hose washing machine, a tall tower to hang and dry hoses, and an extra-large washer for our protective gear.

Each fire station also has a small gym where crews are required to work out on shift to stay in shape for the job, and to be ready for their annual physical test in the fall. Often you’ll see crews working out with large tractor tires, a 150 lb. mannequin, sledge hammers, and bundles of hoses to add functional movements to their exercise routines.

On tours, participants are encouraged to find equipment they’ve never seen before and ask questions about it. Citizens quickly find that an ambulance is almost like a hospital on wheels, with hidden compartments and tools for almost any emergency.

Juvenile Fire Setting
If a young person is using fire dangerously, GJFD offers free education to children and families experiencing fire play, curiosity, or dangerous behavior. We conduct an evaluation of the behavior, offer age-appropriate education, and can connect families with additional resources if needed.

Call (970) 549-5858

SCHOOL SAFETY

In 2018 the School District 51 Safety Committee made a request. They asked that representatives from the District and first responders work together to educate students and parents about school safety, and what occurs during emergency situations on school property. Public Information Officers from the Grand Junction Fire Department, Grand Junction Police Department, and the District took the lead developing a comprehensive script explaining key components of a school safety video. During the summer month dozens of first responders from all over Mesa County gathered at Bookcliff Middle School to film a video detailing typical emergency scenarios and the public safety response that can be expected for each scenario.

Shelter in Place: A school goes into shelter in place if there is law enforcement or public safety activity in the neighborhood around the school. During a shelter in place, all outside doors are locked and nobody is allowed to leave or enter the school. Inside the school, classes are continuing on as normal. Students may not even be aware that a shelter in place is in effect. Sometimes, a shelter in place can start and end so quickly that parents won’t receive a notification until it is over.

Lockdown: Lockdowns happen when a potential threat is reported or there is a situation that could threaten student safety on campus. During a lockdown, all doors inside and outside the school are locked. No one is allowed to leave or enter the school or any of its classrooms.

Reunification: If a school evacuates students to an off-site location, that location will be announced through the district and law enforcement. Parents will be asked to go there to be reunited with their children. Again, any parents picking up a student need to have a photo ID with them.

Officer Joe Chavira, Paramedic Staci Olson, and Educator Tara Sarto dedicated hours to standing under hot lights, and scrutinizing every word to ensure that one simple message was perfectly clear. First responders and educators in Mesa County have the training and dedication to keep our children safe.
Outreach

Prevention Stats
- Crew Inspections: 2,637
- Bureau Inspections: 901
- Construction Inspections: 543
- Plan Reviews: 825

Grand Junction Fire Department Community Outreach provides educational outreach to local schools, assisted living facilities, community groups, businesses, and families aimed at promoting life safety and reducing the number of preventable emergencies.

Our most utilized offerings include hands-only CPR classes every month or for private groups, car seat checks for families, and station tours. We also offer fire extinguisher classes, fall prevention education, and youth fire interventions.

When emergencies happen, it is also our responsibility to collaborate with local media to provide incident information to help the community prevent similar emergencies.

For more information on our services, contact our office at GJFirePIO@GJCITY.org or by phone at (970)549-5858.

Outreach Stats
- 143 classes and public events reaching 7,415
- Added 2,479 Facebook followers
- Our Facebook posts reached people 1,785,086 times with 193,382 total post engagements

We are now using Nextdoor, Meetup, and Instagram

Fire Safety Checklist

Safeguard your home by taking steps to prevent fires from happening. Make your family safer by reducing the chance of fire and having a plan should a fire occur.

72 Hour Kits

Despite the fact that we live in a very safe place, the possibility of a natural disaster happening in or near our home is still probable and real. Even though we don’t face hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, or avalanches, we do face wildfires, flooding, and power outages. Include these supplies in your kit to prepare for any situation and always keep them ready and available at your work, home, or car.

- Water: One gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation
- Food: At least a three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Cell phone with chargers and a backup battery
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and weather radio with tone alert
- Whistle to signal for help
- Medications for you and pets
- Pet food and extra water - enough to last three days
- First aid kit
- Dust mask to help filter contaminated air and plastic sheet to shelter-in-place
- Most toothbrushes, garbage bags and plastic bags for personal cleaning
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- Manual can opener for food
- Flashlight
What aren't you worried about...

Western Colorado residents often pride themselves on their ability to be self-sufficient, but as communities grow and neighbors get closer, safety becomes another more and more for fire safety and prevention. So many fires in our community are preventable: but the safety you, your family, and our community depend on our ability as individuals to make responsible choices to prevent fires. Never leave cooking unattended, dispose of smoking materials the right way every time, maintain your home and living space to reduce fuels, and make sure your electrical systems and appliances are properly maintained.

Smoke Alarms
Smoke alarms play a vital role in reducing fire deaths and injuries by giving you time to get out if there is a fire in your home. Install smoke alarms inside and outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home. To maintain smoke alarms, remember to test them once a month, replace the alarm batteries yearly, and follow all manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and basic maintenance.

Carbon Monoxide
Often called the invisible killer, carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas created when fuels, such as heating or cooking equipment, burn incompletely. To reduce this risk, install CO alarms outside sleeping areas as well as on every level on the home, and test alarms monthly. Don’t forget to keep generators well ventilated, vents clear of snow build-up, and if you need to warm a vehicle, remove it from the garage.

Dryer Fires
Clothes dryers account for 34% of home fires in the United States. However, this risk is easily preventable by making sure your dryer is properly grounded and there are no objects surrounding the dryer. Have your dryer installed and serviced by a professional, cleaning the lint filter before or after each load of laundry and making sure the outdoor vent isn't covered.

Cooking Fires
The number one cause of home fires and injuries is cooking fires. Remember to cook with caution: stay in the kitchen while cooking food, keep anything that can catch on fire – oven mitts, wooden utensils, etc. – away from hot surfaces at all times, and have a “kid-free zone” of 3 feet around cooking surfaces. In general, keep cooking surfaces clean to prevent grease build up, and don’t wear loose clothing while cooking.

Home Fire Drill Plan
1. Draw the floor plan of your house
2. Draw a dotted line showing two ways out
3. Draw an “X” on your family’s meeting place outside your home.
4. Practice your family fire plan at night and during the day.

What’s Wrong with this Picture?

Important Numbers
- Name
- Address
- Phone Number
- Emergency Contact
- Relationship
- Phone
- Emergency Contact
- Relationship
- Phone
- I’m Allergic to
Car Seat Inspections

The best way to keep your child safe in the car is to use the right car seat in the right way. However, three out of four car seats are not used or installed correctly. This can be a scary thought especially for new parents. Luckily, expert help is available, the Grand Junction Fire Department’s Community Outreach Specialists offer free car seat inspections every Tuesday and Thursday from certified car seat technicians who can teach you how to install your car seat properly and answer any questions you may have.

For more information or to schedule an inspection, call (970)549-5858

CALL 9-1-1!

Nobody starts their day hoping they wind up calling 9-1-1. Being mentally prepared and anticipating the kinds of questions Dispatch is going to ask you, can ensure you receive the kind of help you need. Changes in technology can further complicate matters or create assumptions that cause delays. Dispatchers are highly trained professionals that know exactly what information will be necessary for your emergency.

Why do you need my phone number?

911 Dispatch must be able to get you back on the phone if you are disconnected, it also helps us follow-up in the future if we need more details.

I don’t know the address, just send help!

911 Cell phones do not give dispatch an address: we rely on you to give your location. Some phone cameras give dispatch your general location, but this isn’t always reliable. If you don’t know the address, look for landmarks, cross streets, signs or businesses.

Why do I have to answer so many questions?

911 Accurate details about your emergency will ensure the right resources are heading your way quickly. Sharing the details of your emergency ensures that first responders have the right tools to help with your emergency.

Why do I need to stay on the phone?

911 Dispatchers provide life-saving instructions. By staying on the phone you are able to give updates to first responders, and receive directions from dispatch should circumstances worsen.

What should I do before help arrives?

911 Follow the dispatcher’s directions. If you are physically able and it is safe to do so, make sure that doors are unlocked and first responders have easy access to help you.

How can I make myself ready for an emergency?

911 Make sure your address is clearly marked on your home and is visible from the street. Teach your children about calling 9-1-1 and make sure they know how to use your phone during an emergency.

Just the Basics

A properly installed car seat shouldn’t move more than one inch front to back or side to side when pulled at the seat belt path. This rule applies to forward-facing car seats and rear-facing car seats and when the seat is secured with either the seat belt or LATCH. The top tether makes your forward facing car seat extra snug.

Inch Test

Watch this video for a demonstration of the inch test.

Front Facing Seats

The shoulder straps should be at or above your child’s shoulders.

Rear Facing Seats

The shoulder straps should come through the car seat at or below your child’s shoulders.

Pinch Test

Do the pinch test shown on this video to make sure you have a snug fit.

LATCH/Seatbelt

There are two ways to secure a car seat in a vehicle. Both are safe, but don’t use both at the same time. Here’s a video on installing your car seat.