

# SUMMIT FIRE & EMS ANNUAL REPORT 2023



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**On the cover:** Summit Fire & EMS Wildland Engine 11 battles one of numerous fires on a crew deployment to California. At times when local wildfire danger allows, SFE sends crews to fires across the West to assist our neighbors and gain invaluable experience. (Photo credit: SFE Wildland Specialist Hannah Ohlson)

**Above:** Fire-Medic Corey Okes displays his firefighting “bunker gear” for a group of kindergarten students from Frisco Elementary School, as Capt. Matt Brewer looks on. SFE offers station tours to school and community groups, among other options for the public that also include free fire-extinguisher training, classroom visits, public events and participation in civic activities.

## FROM THE CHIEF



As the fire chief for Summit Fire & EMS, I have the privilege of introducing this annual report to the public, detailing the truly selfless, dedicated, excellent work of our team of more than 100 people devoted to keeping our community safe. We are very proud of our work as first responders, starting with preventative measures, education and preparation and then helping those in need by responding quickly, professionally and competently to all types of emergencies and hazards when things do go wrong.

We've had a number of highlights within our organization over the past year. For starters, as a result of a new state law, SFE negotiated its first ever contract with the firefighter's union after a series of amiable discussions on how to best look out for our front-line emergency responders. Thanks to a unanimous vote of our elected Board of Directors, we also brought up the pay scale for all of our employees to be competitive with other departments, starting in 2024.

A number of our crew members earned promotions to fill positions opened by retirements, and still others gained the training they need to be ready to take on higher-ranking positions when they are available, including temporarily covering for those supervisors taking vacations and sick time. Additionally, we "poached" our first employee from one of the big metro-area departments.

While we had another quiet year for wildfires, several of our crews were dispatched to fires across the West, giving them invaluable experience and training that they bring back home. Wildfire remains our community's greatest large-scale threat, and between expanding our dedicated wildland team and redoubling our educational efforts, we remain committed to minimizing the risks and improving our resiliency. To that end, we work continuously with our governmental partners as well as individual property owners and residents to take steps such as improving "defensible space" around structures and neighborhoods and to encourage individual preparedness for an event that we hope will never occur.

This year we pulled together our application for renewing our international accreditation, a department-wide effort that has us evaluating and justifying everything that we do – from purchasing paper clips to getting onto the scene of emergencies quickly – and keeping us on a path of continual improvement.

Finally, a major focus for the year was planning for the new Silverthorne fire station. While it had been in the plans for down the line, we heard loud and clear from our residents at the northern side of the district that we needed to make it a priority, and we are on track to break ground in the spring. As soon as it opens, the station will be staffed around the clock with a paramedic and an EMT, both cross-trained as firefighters for immediate response, and backed up by crews from our other stations.

All in all, we'd have to consider 2023 to be a good year for Summit Fire & EMS, and we look forward to continuing to provide top-notch, all-hazards emergency response, preventing critical situations in the first place and serving our taxpayers proudly. Thank you for your continued interest in your fire department!

—*Chief Travis Davis*

## ABOUT SUMMIT FIRE & EMS

The Summit Fire & EMS Fire Protection District, a special district under Colorado law, provides emergency services for northern Summit County, including Interstate 70 from the Eisenhower Tunnel to Vail Pass, and from Farmer’s Korner/Swan Mountain Road north to the county line. The coverage area includes the municipalities of Copper Mountain, Dillon, Frisco, Keystone, Montezuma and Silverthorne, and unincorporated areas such as Summit Cove and Mesa Cortina/Wilderness. The department also is the primary emergency-response agency for the U.S. Forest Service lands and unincorporated private property north of Silverthorne, including Heeney, creating a total area of about 425 square miles.

Summit Fire & EMS operates four 24-hour fire stations – in Copper Mountain, Dillon, Frisco and Keystone – with an all-hazards response crew and an ambulance crew based in each. The fully professional, well-trained, well-equipped firefighters and medics are prepared to respond to all hazards and work with neighboring departments and other emergency-response agencies on larger, multi-jurisdictional incidents.

In 2023, SFE managed a staff of 101 full-time employees, including 79 line-level first responders and 22 administrative/command and executive staff positions. Emergency crews work out of four 24-hour response stations, and the organization also conducts additional duties from an administration building and two adjunct stations that serve as bases for the SFE Wildland Division and a locally staffed U.S. Forest Service wildfire crew.

Summit Fire & EMS is the result of years of consolidations and mergers of smaller emergency-response agencies, including the Dillon, Dillon Valley and Silverthorne volunteer fire departments – which became the Lake Dillon Fire Authority – and, subsequently, the Frisco and Snake River fire departments, Copper Mountain Fire and the Summit County Ambulance Service.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Summit Fire & EMS is governed by a five-member publicly elected board of directors, who generally serve three-year terms. The board is responsible for governance, financial oversight, policy setting and selection of the fire chief. The current board is comprised of these volunteers:



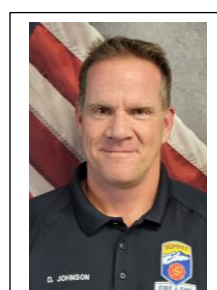
**Lori Miller**  
**President**



**JoeBen Slivka**  
**Vice-President**



**John Piotti**  
**Treasurer**



**Dan Johnson**  
**Director**



**Jonathan Sinclair**  
**Director**

## FACILITIES



Architectural rendering of the future Summit Fire & EMS station in Silverthorne based on SEH Architects design. Groundbreaking is planned in the spring of 2024.

In 2024, Summit Fire & EMS will break ground on a new fire station at the north end of Silverthorne to bolster response times to areas north of Interstate 70. Construction for this project, which has been planned for some time, is expected to cost about \$9.5 million. SFE is also planning for the corresponding increase in staffing and station operation costs, about \$2 million annually.

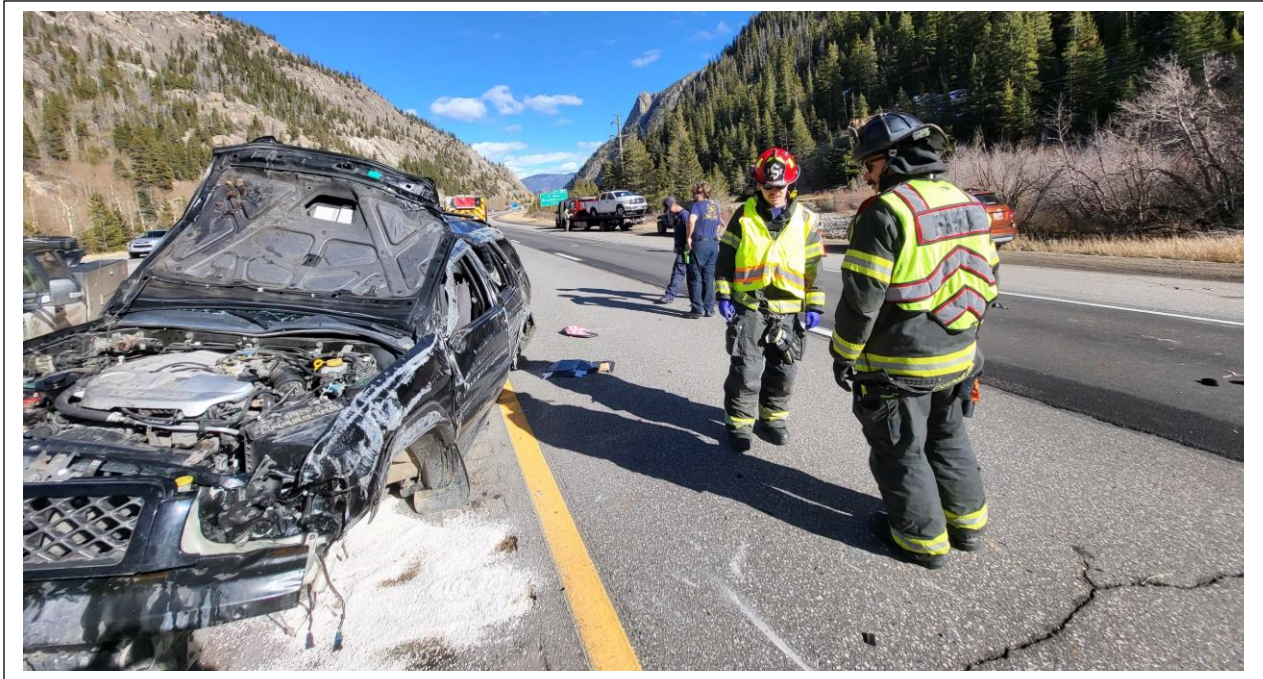
The department selected SEH Architects and Hyder Construction for the design and engineering and allocated an initial \$4 million in capital expenditures in 2023 for the project. Simultaneously, SFE began working with the town for permits and approvals.

The new station will be located between the town of Silverthorne’s maintenance facility and the Blue River Wastewater Treatment Plant, across Colorado 9 from the northern entrance to the Three Peaks neighborhood. It was marked with a “coming soon” sign in the summer of 2023.

SFE has been working with the town to create a station that will adhere to “Firewise construction” and landscaping, to stand as an example of how buildings can fit in with the surroundings and still be resistant to flying embers and flames from a potential wildfire.

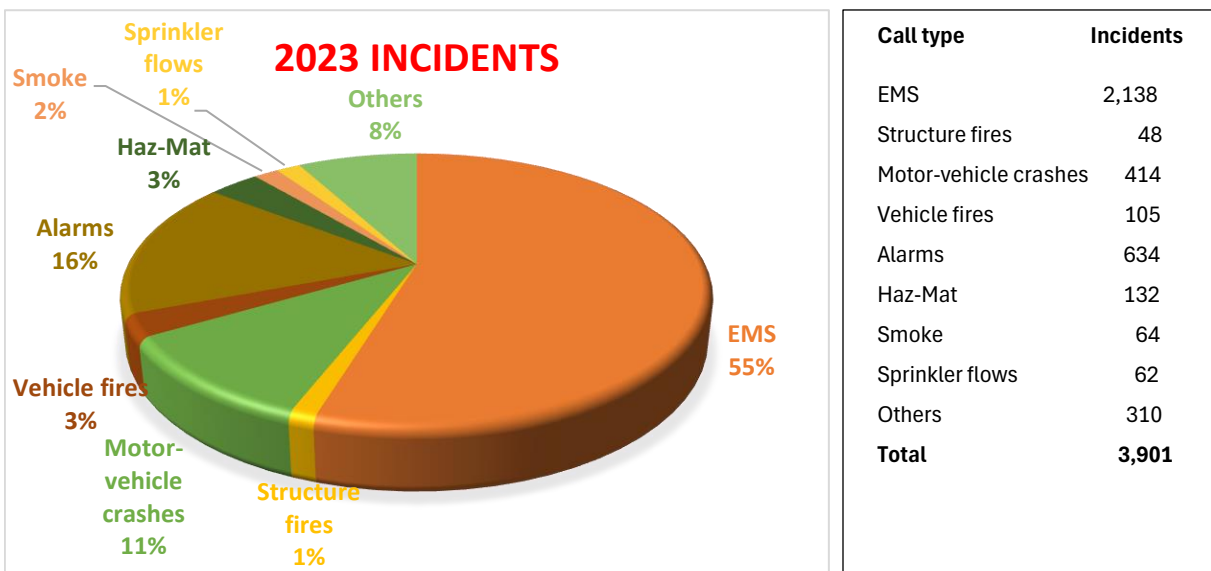
To follow the progress on the new station, see <https://summitfire.org/silverthorne-fire-station-updates>.

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE



In 2023, Summit Fire & EMS responded to 3,901 calls for assistance, a 6.8 percent increase over 2022 – continuing a decades-long trend that reflects both the growth in year-round population and in the number of visitors.

SFE response crews average just over three minutes in turn-out time – from the time an incident is assigned from the 9-1-1 Dispatch Center – and strive to arrive on scene within six minutes of that within the urban areas, longer for those locations farther afield.



## EMERGENCY RESPONSE



In 2023, Summit Fire & EMS brought on board EMS Division Chief Rick Ihnken, who immediately jumped in to oversee updates to numerous policies, software and equipment, quality-improvement efforts and tracking and documentation.

To improve overall emergency response, every ambulance now carries firefighting equipment, allowing our cross-trained medics to assist quickly with fires and other crises when not otherwise focused on medical patients. The number of out-of-county hospital transports dropped to 203, a moderate decrease from 2022 that allows our crews to remain available for local emergency calls, while overall EMS call volume rose to more than 2,100 responses for the year.

SFE partnered with Summit County Public Health in providing education and supplies of opioid-reversal drug Narcan – including distributing doses to employees in case they encounter someone suffering from an overdose when they are off duty – and our medics worked closely with Dillon Police and St. Anthony Summit Hospital on health-promoting special events throughout the year.

The EMS Division received grants for new EMS equipment, including new Zoll heart monitors, and began using new software to track medical interventions and provide data for training. Also, the joint Summit County High Country Training Center was able to provide advanced paramedic training to all of our medics. And our search-and-rescue paramedic program was formalized, allowing our medics to venture into the backcountry with the local rescue team to provide faster, higher-end medical response.

Finally, SFE received a Mission Lifeline Silver recognition for out-of-hospital cardiac care, and our longtime EMS Coordinator Jill Ridenhour was honored with the Women in EMS award at the EMS Association of Colorado's annual conference.

## WILDFIRE



The three-person Summit Fire & EMS Wildland Division oversees the training, equipment and response to wildfires, including performing courtesy wildfire assessments, mandatory defensible-space inspections for new construction and mitigation efforts. With wildfire standing as the single most likely existential threat to our way of life here, every firefighter in the agency maintains a “red card” certification for fighting wildfires, and the department serves as the first-line response to fire starts within the district and in the surrounding White River National Forest. In 2024, the division plans to add a fourth wildland specialist to kick off efforts such as assisting property owners with mitigation such as tree cutting and reduction of flammable vegetation near buildings.

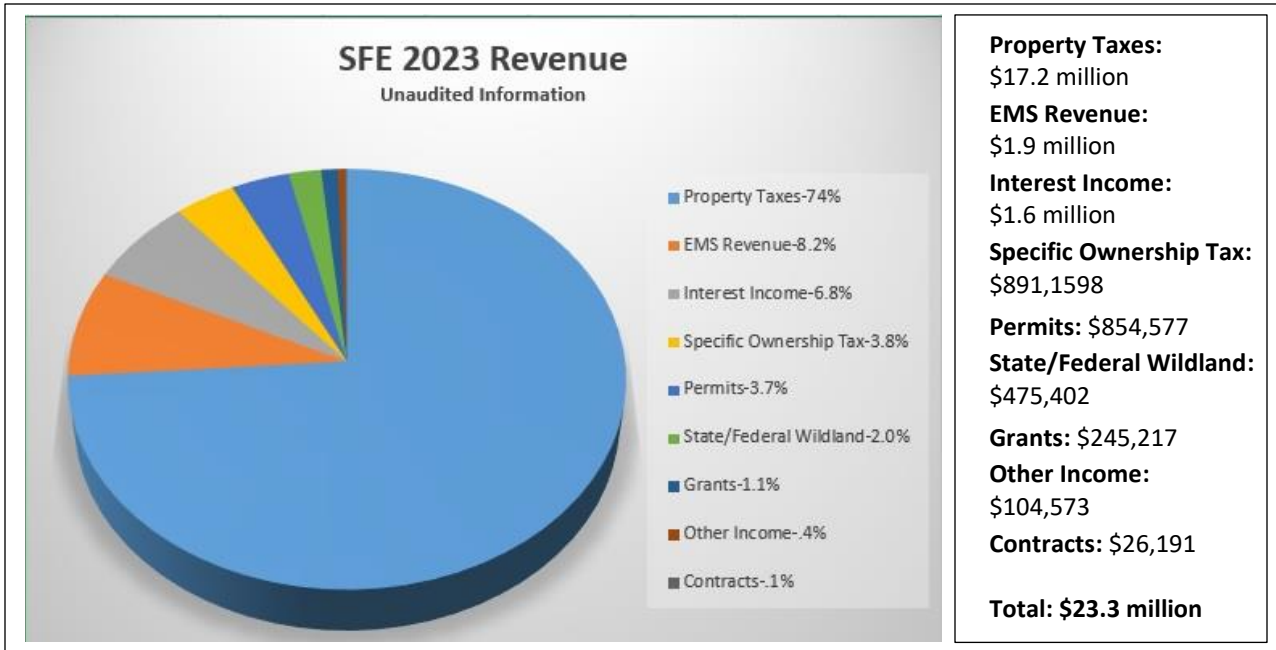
In 2023, the division approved 289 free campfire permits, conducted 85 courtesy wildfire-mitigation assessments for property owners, completed 19 neighborhood/HOA assessments and conducted 253 mandatory defensible-space inspections for new construction.

Additionally, the division coordinated firefighter and medic deployments to several out-of-district wildfires, including the Spring Creek Fire near Parachute and a six-week stint serving on a California “severity” assignment that included responding to numerous small fires and being in place for rapid response for others.

In the fall, the Hamilton Creek neighborhood of Silverthorne attained its national FireWise neighborhood designation, marking a commitment to continually reducing the risk of wildfires to property, joining the Ruby Ranch and Pebble Creek neighborhoods. SFE supports efforts by HOAs to apply for this designation, which may help reduce property-insurance costs.



## ADMINISTRATION



The Summit Fire & EMS budget reflects an organization philosophy of maintaining a staff of well-trained, well-equipped, experienced professionals provided with the tools they need to respond to all hazards and emergencies.

The department maintains apparatus and staff vehicles through the stand-alone enterprise Snake River Fleet Services, which also provides equipment maintenance at cost for neighboring fire departments. Front-line response equipment is replaced at regularly scheduled intervals based on use, ensuring that response crews have safe, up-to-date and modern tools to do their jobs.

Property owners pay 13 mills in taxes annually to the district, or the equivalent of \$468 for every \$500,000 of property value. The district tax receipts for 2023 were \$17.1 million, an increase of 2.5 percent over the previous year.

General Fund income for 2023 reflected a 13.3 percent decrease when compared to the 2022 budgeted income. This mainly was due to the sunset of the EMS Safety First Funds in 2022.

Tax Increment Financing, which has been overlaid on a portion of the town of Silverthorne and all of the town of Dillon, reduces the taxable assessed valuation of the district, resulting in a \$532,298 loss of revenue.

Summit Fire & EMS has operated debt-free, including paying up front for new apparatus, to avoid using tax dollars for debt service.

The budget is approved by the publicly elected SFE Board of Directors and audited annually.

A copy of the budget is available upon request at the district's administration building, at 0035 County Shops Road in the County Commons complex.

## ADMINISTRATION



The bulk of the Summit Fire & EMS annual budget directly supports emergency response, with about 77 percent dedicated to firefighter and medic salaries and benefits and their on-the-job duties.

The budgeted capital expenditures for 2023 totaled \$5.1 million, which included \$4 million toward a new fire station in Silverthorne; \$475,000 for new ECG monitors and CPR bag replacements, of which \$221,467 is reimbursed through an EMTS grant; \$205,000 in vehicles and vehicle improvements; \$186,800 in station improvements; \$149,000 in wildland vehicles and shelters; \$55,000 for radios; and \$50,000 for information technology and cyber security.

The total estimate in reserve for the operating fund at the end of 2023 was \$20.5 million, of which \$18,998,448 is unencumbered and would provide for an estimated 13 months of operations.

### Accreditation

Five years ago, Summit Fire & EMS earned accreditation from the Center for Public Safety Excellence, an international fire-department accrediting organization, and now is seeking its five-year renewal.

Accreditation requires intensive examination of everything we do, as well as plans for continual improvement. It is a badge assuring the public that the organization is operating at the industry’s highest standards.

A peer team of colleagues from around the country visited in November of 2023 and offered recommendations as well as plenty of commendations.

SFE is scheduled to appear before the full commission in late February of 2024 for a hearing on whether the renewal application is approved.

## COMMUNITY RISK DIVISION/PREVENTION



The SFE Community Risk Division, operating under the fire marshal, protects lives and property through planning, education and inspections.

With a staff of six full-time inspectors including supervisors, the division conducted 924 inspections for new construction and safety systems and another 429 annual fire-safety inspections of existing commercial properties, issued 365 wildfire-mitigation permits, conducted 65 fire drills at local schools and updated 2,187 “pre-plans” that can be used to direct fire response at businesses throughout the district.

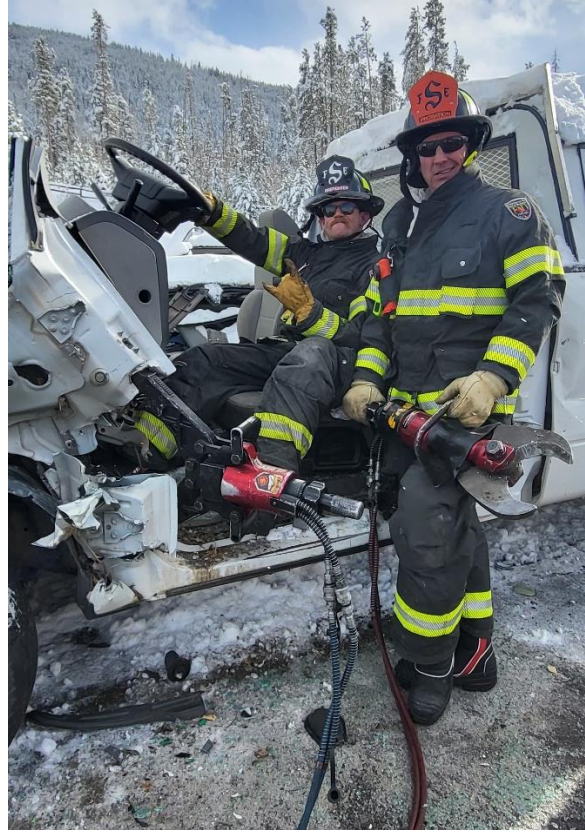
The division generated \$852,118 in permit fees, \$22,500 in fire-mitigation permits and \$2,500 in fines for repeated or dangerous violations of the fire code.

Each October, SFE visits all four of the elementary schools in the district to teach every student from pre-school through fifth

grade age-appropriate fire-safety lessons as part of the national observation of Fire Prevention Week. In 2023, that meant that our team of inspectors, first responders and educators reached 1,223 students via 44 class sessions to discuss what to do when fire alarms sound, how to find the fastest, safest and easiest exit, and how they should react in an emergency.

Additionally, the district hosted its first-ever Wildfire Rendezvous in the spring to help raise public awareness of the threat of wildfire and how best to be prepared for it.

Summit Fire & EMS participates regularly in community events and educational efforts, including teaming with other organizations in promoting safety and providing services such as free hands-on fire-extinguisher training for businesses and civic organizations and offering free one-on-one wildfire assessments of existing residential properties.



**Clockwise from upper left:** Wildfire training in the spring helped the U.S. Forest Service prepare a site above the Summit County landfill for a proposed “controlled burn” slated for 2024 and gave our crews practice in the arduous task of digging fire line. Using donated old vehicles at the High Country Training Center, crew members conduct “extradiction training” to practice getting passengers out of wrecks. SFE firefighters and medics always are a popular draw at career days, like this one at Summit Middle School.

