

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 14, 2011

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO: 60 FIRE DEPARTMENT OVERTIME BUDGET

At the April 11 City Council budget work session on public safety, there were several questions asked about the additional \$700,000 for overtime in FY 12 for the Fire Department. The chart below shows historical budgets and spending levels:

Fire Dept. Overtime Expenses – Reflects all OT Spending (Fire & EMS)

	Total OT Budget	Spending as of March 31	Yearly OT Expenditures	Balance
FY 09	\$1,049,774	\$1,528,651	\$2,093,846	\$-565,195
FY 10	\$1,108,254	\$2,039,250	\$2,852,675	\$-1,744,421
FY 11	\$1,132,381	\$2,252,510	\$2,640,362*	\$-1,507,981*
<i>FY 12</i>	<i>\$1,813,340</i>	<i>\$1,360,005*</i>	<i>\$1,813,340*</i>	<i>\$0*</i>

*Reflects projected figures

As the chart displays, the Fire Department's overtime budget for the last three years has been inadequate. The additional \$700,000 is designed to mitigate this issue. If the department comes in at the proposed overtime budget for FY 12, it will represent a reduction in overtime expenses of \$750,000 - \$900,000 from prior years.

It is also important to note that approximately 85% of the department's overtime is related to minimum staffing, and 8.5% of all overtime is related to training.

Minimum staffing is currently defined as three personnel on a Fire apparatus and two personnel on an ambulance. Minimum staffing overtime is required when these numbers of personnel are not available on any engine, ladder, or ambulance. The alternative to overtime is to decommission the apparatus for that day.

Both the Fire and EMS Suppression minimum staffing overtime has decreased significantly since the release of new recruits into the field. For instance, in the month of July 2010, (before 31 new Fire Suppression recruits were released into the field) Fire overtime hours for minimum staffing was 5,064. In the month of March (with the new recruits released to minimum staffing), the Fire overtime hours for minimum staffing was 833.

For EMS Suppression, in July 2010, (before 14 new recruits were released into the field) overtime hours for minimum staffing was 1,681. In March (with the new recruits released into the field) the overtime hours for minimum staffing decreased to 1,037.

In terms of controlling overtime, there are certain steps that can be taken but there are limitations as well. The Fire Department currently has 38 uniformed "slots" that need to be filled every day for Fire Suppression minimum staffing, and 16 minimum uniformed slots in EMS. When one of these slots is vacant either by annual leave, sick leave, light duty, etc., the slot must be backfilled with minimum staffing overtime.

If overtime is not used, the apparatus is not placed in service and results in reduced coverage in the City. In order to ensure that the overtime problem does not grow, the Department has taken the following steps:

1. Allow only six leave slots per day for Fire and four leave slots per day for EMS. This means that only six and four personnel are authorized to be on annual leave at any point in a day.
2. Reduce sick leave. A new sick leave policy was instituted in 2009 whereby Department personnel are allowed three unscheduled sick leave incidents before going on a Sick Leave Oversight Program. Since calendar 2008, total sick leave hours for uniformed personnel has reduced from 30,648 hours to 18,119 hours in calendar 2010.
3. Revised light duty policy. Working in conjunction with the City's Human Resources Department, the Fire Department instituted a policy that offers employees on light duty for 52 weeks a choice to return to work or be released from employment. Employees are given counseling and offered chances to return to work in their previous capacity.

In addition, the Department incurs overtime for staffing related to emergency events. For instance, the Department upstaffed engines in February 2011 in advance of potential snow storm accidents at morning rush hour. That month, Prince George's and Prince William counties experienced wildfires in which they requested our mutual aid. To protect the City during severe red flag conditions potentially resulting in an urban conflagration, we responded using employees on overtime (these events differ from City-wide emergencies in which all overtime costs are managed centrally).