

**FIRE WORKWEEK**

**Fire Department Workweek Reduction**

The FY 2019 proposed budget calls for implementing the first stage of a reduction of the Arlington County Fire Department’s (ACFD) scheduled work hours from an average of 56 hours per week to 50 hours. If approved, the reduction is achieved by adding nine (9) new FTE’s per year over the next four years at an estimated cost of \$1 million per year, or \$4 million total. This would increase staffing to the level necessary to cover an extra day off every 28-days for employees assigned to Operations, thus reducing the number of hours worked.

With a reduction in the hours worked, the number of personnel assigned to each shift would be at a level that permits a portion of each shift to be off duty without the shift falling below the requisite number of personnel necessary to staff all stations and response units. This rotating day off is known as a “Kelly Day” and provides individual members with an additional 24 hours off per month.

This proposal addresses a number of factors, including escalating and sustained levels of attrition and difficulties in recruitment for the ACFD. When reviewing other benefits, ACFD pay lags most of the other jurisdictions in the region and the proposed budget begins to address this discrepancy. Public safety retirement and health benefits remain competitive.

**Current Challenges with the ACFD Shift Schedule**

At present, there are three operational shifts in ACFD. Members assigned to a shift work a rotating schedule of 24 hours that results in an average 56-hour workweek. Depending on the schedule rotation some weeks may be 72-hours.

The current work schedule is: personnel begin a shift at 7 a.m. and work for 24 hours; this is followed by a 24-hour period off, followed by another 24 hours on-duty, another 24 hours off and finally, a third 24-hour shift on-duty; the cycle ends with a four day-off period:

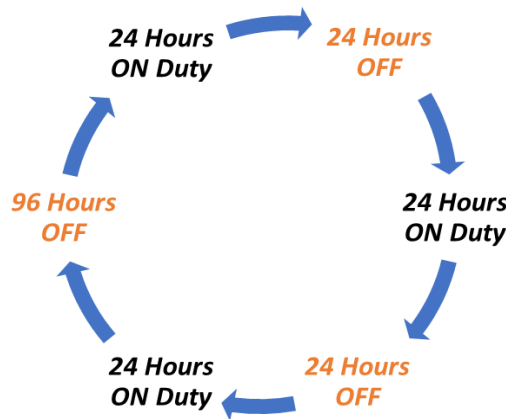


Figure 1: 56 Hour Workweek

While the Arlington shift results in an average of ten work days per month, it is useful to note the accumulation of hours over a year for different work schedules:

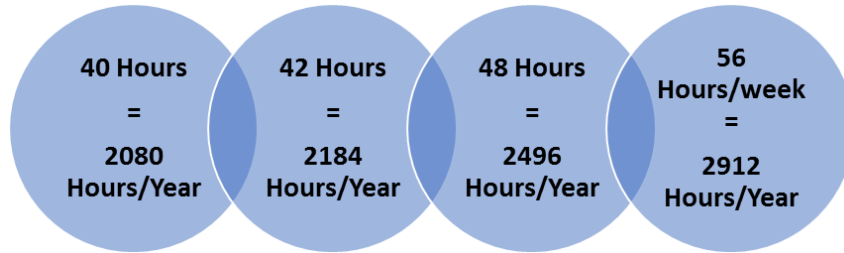


Figure 2: Impact of Weekly Work Hours:

**Regional Partners Shift Schedule**

While the 56-hour week was once the norm in the fire and EMS service, in recent years, other jurisdictions in our region have moved to reduce the scheduled hours worked. The workweek in fire and EMS departments elsewhere in our region are as follows:

Jurisdictional Benchmarks	
Loudoun County District of Columbia Prince Georges County Anne Arundel County	42 Hours
Prince William County Montgomery County	48 Hours
Fairfax County Alexandria Airports	56 Hours

In systems that work a 42-hour week there are four shifts to staff operations and the scheduling cycle is much simpler. Personnel work one 24-hour shift followed by three days, or 72 hours, off.

In Prince William County, most personnel who work a 48-hour workweek are on 12-hour shifts that are daytime only. There are a small number of personnel assigned to a 24-hour shift. In Prince William and Montgomery County, where Fire personnel also work a 48-hour week on a 24-hour shift, there are, like Arlington, three shifts. Both Prince William and Montgomery utilize the Kelly Day.

**History and Background of the ACFD Workgroup**

In the summer of 2016 the Fire, Human Resources and Management and Finance Departments created a workgroup to examine compensation and work-life balance issues among Operations (shift) employees in the ACFD. Workgroup representation from ACFD included management, leadership from the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 2800 and other members of the department. The group examined considerable data to analyze the attrition problem as well as conditions offered

by other jurisdictions competing for the same employees. This led to the conclusion that Arlington could substantially improve its attractiveness as an employer and improve job satisfaction by reducing the number of hours worked by shift employees. While the workgroup recommended a reduction to 42-hours, the County Manager is not recommending that solution now. That is a subject for a future discussion should the 50-hour schedule be approved and favorably evaluated.

In practical terms, high attrition also influences job satisfaction. When there are a high number of vacancies, the department must rely on overtime to meet minimum staffing needs. While this can have a significant impact on the budget it also frequently leads to mandatory overtime, (i.e., personnel unable to go home at the end of a shift because staffing minimums cannot be met.) Because high turnover creates vacancies, hiring challenges associated with the department's ability to train those that are recruited cannot be fixed in a short period of time. Entry level training takes six months and there is a limited organizational capacity to train large or frequent classes of new recruits thus continuing an overreliance on overtime to the detriment of the budget and morale.

The workgroup concluded that a reduction in hours worked could have a positive effect on compensation (fewer hours worked has the effect of raising the hourly rate), job satisfaction and competitiveness, all of which could lead to lower attrition.

Not to be lost in the analysis is the well-being of employees. Fire and EMS employees who work long hours are more susceptible to illness and injury. Sleep deprivation is a constant concern as it relates to performance as well as employee health and longevity. Fire and EMS departments that work less hours typically see fewer injuries, less cost associated with injuries and less use of sick leave. Fewer hours worked results in more recovery time.

### **Additional Actions and Recruitment**

ACFD is not remaining static in its recruitment efforts. Competition will remain as jurisdictions vie for the same candidates in a strong employment market. Some fire departments like Loudoun and Prince William are growing because of declining volunteer participation and the need to add career personnel to meet service demands. Other jurisdictions are seeing large numbers of retirements caused in part by their own growth out of the legacy volunteer systems a generation ago. To attract the best qualified applicants ACFD is committed to new and different ways to recruit and train that can maximize its resources, keep up with acceptable attrition and distinguish Arlington as an attractive employer.

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