

Schenectady Fire Department Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How do I contact the Fire Department?

For fire or medical emergencies, call 911. For non-emergencies, or for information, please dial directly to the appropriate Divisions listed below:

- Administration Office 382-5141
- Fire Prevention/Investigation 382-5141, ext. 5808
- Hazardous Materials 382-5141, ext. 5815
- Fire Training 382-5141, ext. 5816
- Juvenile Firesetter Intervention 382-5141, ext. 5817

When should I call 911?

For fires or medical emergencies, call 911 immediately! Even the smallest fire can grow in danger and intensity in a matter of moments. A single match can cause the destruction of an entire building. Do not hesitate!

A person can die from loss of blood (external or internal) due to an injury very quickly. Don't delay!

Heart attacks and Brain Attacks (strokes) can also cause serious injury or death very quickly. Don't ignore the signs and symptoms listed below:

Heart Attack

- Chest discomfort. Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back. The discomfort can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain.
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body. Can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- Shortness of breath. Often comes along with chest discomfort. But it also can occur before chest discomfort.
- Other symptoms. May include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness.

Brain Attack (Stroke)

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

What happens when I call 911?

In Schenectady, a Priority Dispatch System is in place. Calls to 911 are received by Emergency Communications Dispatchers located in the 911 center. The call taker will ask a number of questions related to the information given and the appropriate fire apparatus (or police response) will be sent.

Our Dispatchers are the first link in emergency response, so callers will be asked to provide important, often life-saving, information. The number of responding apparatus and the level of response will be determined by that information.

What constitutes an emergency?

Firefighting priorities are life safety, property conservation, and incident stabilization. Life safety rises above all else. It is often said that firefighters do it all, and that's very true. Almost any time that a situation can not be resolved simply and safely, the fire department will respond. Besides fires, electrical emergencies, hazardous conditions, hazardous materials, flooding, and almost any kind of accident or medical condition will result in a call for firefighters. However, some examples of non-emergency calls that the fire department has received (and these are true) include requests for help in carrying groceries, assistance with the TV remote, white powder on a porch (from Avon) and other similar tasks. It must be noted that with the volume of fire department demands and limited resources, calls which may be regarded as abuse of the emergency response system pull valuable Fire and EMS assets away from deserving people who may be in dire need of assistance.

What are Response Codes and what do they mean?

Fire Engines, Rescues, and Fire Trucks (ladder trucks) will be dispatched according to the information provided by the caller. For Emergency Medical Services (EMS) calls, the response will be given an Echo, Delta, Charlie, Bravo, or Alpha designation. A cardiac arrest will be an Echo response, for example, and a minor, non-life threatening injury or medical condition will receive an Alpha code. For fire calls, an exterior investigation of an odor of smoke will receive a less urgent code than a structure fire or report of flames visible. Priority 1 is an immediate response with lights and sirens operating. Priority 2 is an immediate response with NO lights or siren. These are examples, only. Every caller will be asked a number of questions by the call-taker and the appropriate response will then be assigned.

Why does a fire engine respond for medical emergencies?

Schenectady Firefighters are also paramedics. The same firefighters who bravely battle blazes are trained to respond to vehicle accidents, traumatic injuries, and medical emergencies, as well. All Schenectady Fire Department fire apparatus are staffed with paramedics for Advanced Life Support (ALS) treatment of life threatening injuries or medical conditions. Life safety is our primary mission, no matter what the situation.

Why does a fire engine from another part of the City respond to my neighborhood?

The days when every neighborhood had its own fire station are past. Today, four fire stations are strategically located throughout Schenectady. Due to the high volume of calls and the increased demands for emergency service, it is often necessary for firefighters to travel across the City when the closest fire apparatus is involved in another emergency incident. Response codes will determine whether fire apparatus will respond with lights and sirens, or with a lower level response.

Do firefighters still rescue animals in trees?

The answer is a qualified yes. If an animal can be removed safely, both for the firefighters and the animal itself, we will try to assist. If left alone, animals will generally come down on their own, with little effect or consequence, even after several days. Prevention of such a situation is preferable to dealing with it later.

Who is responsible for fire hydrants?

Fire hydrants and water mains are the domain of the Water Department for the City of Schenectady. Drinking water and water for fire suppression run through the same water mains; that's why after a fire, sometimes tap water will appear discolored. Leaking water mains and damaged or leaking fire hydrants should be reported immediately to the Water Department. In the winter, property owners are responsible for clearing snow from around fire hydrants, as well.

The City of Schenectady is located on the Mohawk River. Do Schenectady Firefighters have a boat?

The Schenectady Fire Department does have a power boat which annually responds to a number of water related emergencies on the river. We also have a small rowboat which has been utilized many times in the Stockade during flooding and in Central Park's Iroquois Lake. Once again, life safety is our primary mission, and takes priority over such things as floating or detached docks or similar property damage, and this will determine whether a water based response is appropriate.

What is the law on open burning in Schenectady?

Under the Schenectady Code, Article II, Miscellaneous Provisions, Section 156-7.1, titled Open Fires: Only approved receptacles are permitted for fires. Within the City of Schenectady, there are no such receptacles approved for wood burning. Charcoal or gas grills are permitted. The section continues to state that burning of garbage or any material which would produce noxious odors is prohibited and subject to fines. As soon as a call or complaint is received regarding smoke that creates a deleterious health effect, the fire must be extinguished. Open burning is a violation of NYS Environmental laws as well. Burning wood in indoor fireplaces and wood stoves is currently allowed under City and State law, but recent decisions on wood furnaces may indicate that restrictions might be coming our way with these devices, as well.

Who is responsible for maintaining Smoke Detectors in rental property?

The landlord is responsible for providing smoke detectors and will not receive a rental certificate from Code Enforcement until it is verified that a rental property has properly operating smoke detectors. Under the City of Schenectady Code, tenants and landlords share responsibility for maintaining smoke detectors. That means that the landlord must provide working smoke detectors according to the requirements of the Code, but also that tenants must ensure that the devices are operating. This mutual responsibility also means that tenants and landlords are both subject to fines when detectors are found to be non-operational or rendered intentionally ineffective. These fines can be substantial and increase every day the detector is not operational

Where can I find a copy of a fire report?

Fire reports may be obtained at the Law Department at City Hall. There may be a slight charge for processing and copying fire reports.

How can I learn more about fire safety?

Please contact the Division of Fire Prevention/Investigation for more information and tips on fire safety. We believe in practicing fire safety every day of the year, not just during Fire Prevention Week in October. Please do not hesitate to call us at any time for fire safety information or to answer your questions.