2020 Fire Warden Survey Results

In January 2020, the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation sent a survey to all town fire wardens. The goal of this survey was to understand the strengths of the Town Fire Warden Program, as well as identify areas in which the Program can improve. The Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation will use the information gathered from this survey to further improve the Town Fire Warden Program. Survey questions, general results, and trends of the 107 returned paper and electronic surveys are reported below.

***Questions 1-3: What is the best method(s) for us to communicate with you for each of the following items (training announcements, reappointment paperwork, general program information)?***

Responding wardens generally preferred receiving training announcements (85%), reappointment paperwork (61%), and general program information (75%) via email.

***Questions 4-8: Materials and Resources***

***Question 4: Rate the following items in importance to you as a Town Forest Fire Warden on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being less important and 5 being most important: Vermont Town Forest Fire Warden Handbook; Warden Directory (phone book); Spring Training; Website; Contact with Fire Program Staff.***

All five items received high marks for importance. For each listed item, the most selected importance level was 5 (most important). The Warden Directory received the greatest percentage of low importance votes (22% of responding wardens gave it a 1 or 2).

***Question 5: What resources would you like to see on the Wildland Fire Program Website?***

Of the 107 survey takers, 57 wardens answered this question. Most responses focused on a desire for increased training, as well as advanced notification and information about nearby trainings that will be occurring. Other resources requested include: Factsheets for people requesting burn permits, rules and regulations, DEC contact information in case of violations, a calendar of fire events, fire weather information, and information on resources available to Town Fire Wardens.

***Question 6: Are there other resources you need?***

31 of the 47 respondents to this question did not need additional resources. Of the other responses, needed resources included increased training opportunities, sharing of fire danger with local news outlets, educational information and signs to display in public, enforcement assistance from ANR/DEC, and an online permitting system.

***Question 7: How important are the following Vermont Town Fire Warden identification materials to you? Rate 1-5, with 5 being the most important: Certificate of Appointment; Identification Card; Notice Poster for Town Offices; License Plate; Other.***

All the listed items received more 5 scores (most important) than any other score. Approximately 34 percent of responding wardens gave the license plate a 1 (least important) or 2 (less important), while the identification card received the most 5 ratings (48.5%).

***Question 8: Are there other resources you recommend for identification?***

Of the 51 responses to this question, 23 responses were “no” or some form of it. The remaining 28 responses included driveway warden signs, articles of clothing to wear at town events or when dealing with complaints, photo ID or more durable ID card, a standardized uniform or shirt and cap, and a license plate design more similar to those of fire departments.

***Question 9- Wildland Fire Reporting: Some Vermont Town Fire Wardens are under reporting wildland fires.  What statement(s) best describe your situation?  Please check all that apply: I always report the wildland fires in my town; I already report to the Vermont Dept. of Public Safety; I don’t have enough time to report; I’m not aware of all the fires in my town; I don’t feel the wildland fires occurring in my town are significant enough to report; Other.***

66 percent of responding wardens selected that they always report the fires in their towns. Already reporting to the Department of Public Safety, not feeling the fires were significant enough to support, and other received approximately the same number of responses (16 or 17 percent). 10 percent of responding wardens claimed they were not aware of all fires in their town, while only 2 wardens claimed they do not have enough time to report. The majority of “other” responses were due to towns not having any fires to report.

***Question 10- Burn Permits: On average, how many burn permits do you issue per year (Permit to Kindle Fire)?***

42 percent of responding wardens issue more than 100 permits per year, while 24 percent of wardens reported issuing between 50 and 100 permits annually. 32 percent of wardens issue less than 50 permits annually, while only one warden reported not issuing any permits.

***Questions 11-16: Training***

***Question 11: The Town Forest Fire Warden training/annual meeting is useful and assists me in my role as fire warden: Strongly agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly disagree.***

Of the 99 responses to this question, only 5 wardens selected “disagree” or “strongly disagree”. 31 wardens strongly agreed, 34 agreed, and 29 were neutral to the question.

***Question 12: Why do you attend the Town Forest Fire Warden training? Check all that apply: Part of Fire Warden job description; Networking; Stay current; Beneficial training; Payment; I do not attend; Other (please specify).***

The two most chosen reasons for attending the Town Forest Fire Warden training were to stay current and that it is part of the job description, with 72 percent of responding wardens selecting these options. 60 percent of the 99 wardens who answered this question attend the training because the training is beneficial, while 46 percent of responding wardens attend to network. 6 percent of responding wardens claimed to attend for the payment, and 9 percent of wardens responded that they do not usually attend.

***Question 13: What topics would you like to see at the Town Forest Fire Warden training? Check all that apply: Tabletop exercise; Field exercise; Current events; Latest research and technology; Year in review (notable fires, weather); Partnership opportunities; Specific topics or speakers.***

The latest research and technology (67%), year in review (65%), and current events (53%) received majority support by responding fire wardens. All other topics were selected by less than 40% of the 96 wardens who responded to this question. Some of the specific groups and topics that wardens expressed interest in seeing included speakers focused on safety in wildland fire response, wildland firefighters with recent experience in large fires, violation reporting and enforcement, warden jurisdiction and authority, and weather trends.

***Question 14: When should we hold our in-person Town Forest Fire Warden training: Spring; Summer; Fall; Winter?***

75 percent of responding wardens prefer to hold the Town Forest Fire Warden training in the spring.

***Question 15: What time should we hold it: Weekday daytime, Weekend daytime; Weekday evening; Weekend evening?***

73 percent of responding wardens prefer to hold the Town Forest Fire Warden training on a weekday evening.

***Question 16: How can the Wildland Fire Program improve its training opportunities? Please check all that apply: Online training; Recorded webinars; District networking and learning events; Statewide conference; Other (please specify).***

Nearly 70 percent of responding wardens believe online training would be improve the Wildland Fire Program improve its training opportunities. Approximately 50 percent of responding wardens selected district networking and learning events as a potential training improvement. 34 percent of responding wardens favored recorded webinars, while 30 percent selected a statewide conference.

***Questions 17-20: Support***

***Question 17: How would you describe the level of support provided to Town Forest Fire Wardens by the Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation’s Wildland Fire Program: Not supported; Would like more interaction with fire program staff; No need for support from fire program staff; Fire Program staff are responsive to most of my needs; Fully supported.***

83 percent of responding wardens felt that they were either fully supported or that Fire Program staff are responsive to most of their needs. 20 percent of responding wardens noted that they would still like more interaction with the Fire Program staff.

***Question 18: How can the Wildland Fire Program better support you?***

39 wardens responded to this survey question. Of those responses, 19 wardens expressed receiving sufficient support from the Wildland Fire Program. Other suggestions included regular updates via email, improved communication, more field exercises, updated FPR staff contact information, and improved warden onboarding.

***Question 19: To help us better serve you, please tell us which district you are served by:***

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| --- | --- | --- |
| *District: County* | *%* | *# of Wardens* |
| *District 1:  Windham and Windsor counties* | *18.95%* | *18* |
| *District 2:  Bennington and Rutland counties* | *14.74%* | *14* |
| *District 3:  Addison, Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle counties* | *25.26%* | *24* |
| *District 4:  Orange, Washington and Lamoille counties* | *22.11%* | *21* |
| *District 5:  Caledonia, Orleans and Essex counties* | *18.95%* | *18* |

***Question 20: Anything else you would like to tell us?***

25 of the 35 responses to this question were either a form of “no comment” or thanks to FPR staff. A sample of the responses to this question are below:

“Keep up the good work!”

“The PSA's you push out really creates a public awareness and makes my job easier.”

“Contact more from office, like checking in with us more.”

“More in field line construction training.”

“Any time I have called for intel or the use of Smokey, Dan and team are always willing to accommodate. Great team in Essex.”

“I love being a fire warden but feel that if you are a warden for a town with no fire department, meaning you aren't on a fire department, you don't get any training opportunities.”

***Conclusion***

The Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation thanks all wardens who took the time to respond to this survey. We appreciate your input, and will use your feedback to improve the Wildland Fire Program going forward. Many of these suggested improvements are already underway, and we will continue to grow and improve as we can with your help!