

LOCAL NEWS

Just What Is the Sonoita Elgin Fire District?



by Eddie McArthur

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In Arizona, fire districts are special taxing districts organized under the Arizona Revised Statutes. They operate independent of other governments and are funded mainly through property taxes in the district they serve.

The **Sonoita Elgin Fire District** (SEFD) is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of five people, who are elected on a non-partisan basis. The Board hires a Fire Chief who handles day-to-day operations and supervises all other employees. Currently the District has 40 members: 13 full-time, eight part-time and 19 volunteers.

SEFD encompasses 350 square miles. We respond to fires in this large, rural area, resulting in challenges to response times. In addition to structure fires, we deal with what are termed ‘wild land fires.’ That may be a grass fire spreading across a plain or a fire within a more forested area. We have no public water available, meaning we must haul water to fires.

Our Certificate of Necessity boundary (CON), meaning that area in which we are responsible for EMS ambulance transport, is even larger. That area is 750 square miles and covers areas in which we are not responsible for fire response. It runs all the way to the Mexico border, over to the Cochise County border, and well past Patagonia. Generally, we have far more EMS calls than fire calls.

We cover a lot of territory with a relatively small number of personnel and available equipment. Response times are affected by the distance we travel as well as severe weather such as monsoons. There are more unpaved than paved roads in our area of service, and some remote properties are accessible only by 4-wheel drive vehicles.

In September 2023, which included the rodeo, we responded to 78 incidents. Four of those were fires, 38 were EMS calls, and 36 were for other services, which can include snake removal, smoke detector checks, vehicle lock outs, lift assists and blood pressure checks.

We operate three shifts, each headed by a captain who is also a trained paramedic. We have personnel trained in Hazmat, ropes rescue, confined space rescue, and driver/operator.

Future articles in the PRT will address a variety of topics from ‘what it takes to outfit a firefighter’ to ‘what happens when I call 911 for service?’ Send questions or comments to Meredith@sefd911.org

Eddie McArthur is a member of the SEFD Board of Directors.

