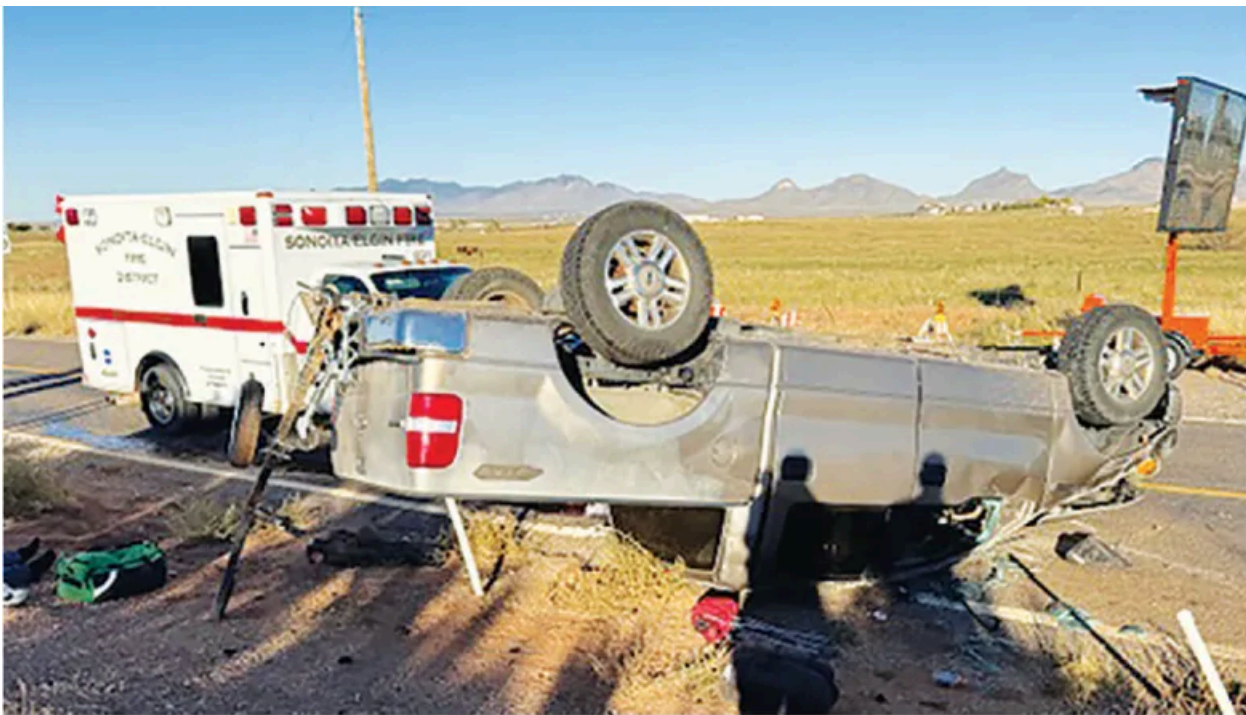


COLUMNS

Notes From SEFD: Making Informed Decisions



by Eddie McArthur
December 5, 2025



SEFD responds to a rollover accident. The station has had over 700 calls for aid each of the last three years. Photo courtesy SEFD

Making informed decisions requires information. The Sonoita-Elgin Fire District (SEFD) captures detailed information regarding service calls of all types. We responded to 68 incidents during October 2025. Of those, four were fire calls and 34 were rescue and/or EMS calls.

Our other activities range from snake removal calls to an ambulance presence (with staffing) at a public event like the rodeo or a bike race.

Our coverage area is divided into five zones. Zone 1 is the area nearest the crossroads and includes most of the businesses within our district. Zone 2 is to the north and contains a great deal of public land. Zone 3 is our easternmost area, including Rain Valley and toward Cochise County. Zone 4 is the southernmost part of the district and includes areas around Canelo. Zone 5 includes areas outside the fire district but within our Certificate of Necessity (CON) which defines the geographic boundaries, and establishes service rules

for ground ambulance transport. This area extends west as far as Patagonia Lake State Park and to the south toward the Mexican border. Most SEFD activity generally centers around Zone 1.

We look at each incident we cover, what it is about, time and day, for each zone. So far this year, SEFD has handled 606 fire and EMS calls. Although every day is busy, weekends are our busiest time. Looking at which days of the week saw the most calls, Mondays saw 73 calls, Tuesdays 91, Wednesdays 88, Thursdays 78, Fridays 83, Saturdays 100 and Sundays 93. The majority of our calls are during the day. Because we track this information, we can confidently say that weekend days are when we handle the most calls.

We also look at the type of calls. Rescue and EMS, at over 60%, keeps us the most busy. Fire calls represent just 4.62%, obviously the most dangerous activity.

What has changed recently is the increase of the number of calls that come in while we are already involved with another call. Approximately 30% of calls coming in are classified as concurrent. Given that normal staffing at the station consists of four firefighters, not including the Chief or Admin, everyone on duty gets called out if two calls come in at the same time. Each call requires at least two firefighters or firefighter/EMTs. For fire calls, we generally dispatch both a fire engine and an ambulance.

We recently experienced three EMS calls at the same time. The first call sent an ambulance to one of the furthest areas of our coverage. The second went the opposite direction, again far from the station. Both required transport. Then came the third call. That third call involved serious bleeding. Chief Meredith maintains his paramedic certification and is fully operationally qualified just for this type of situation. He was able to stop the bleeding, but transporting a patient requires two of our trained professionals, one driving the ambulance and one in back with the patient. Because of this, the Chief needed to call on another agency to handle the transport.

We are nearing the time when staffing adjustments may be needed. By the end of the year we will have had over 700 calls for the third year in a row, and that is with a significant decrease in wildland fires the last two years. The next time we have a typical wildland fire year we could have over 800 calls, which may well be the tipping point.

We run three shifts of four personnel each. How to adjust, where/when to add, etc., requires careful analysis of how our personnel are being used. Adding doesn't necessarily mean adding to each shift on each day. Because we have developed a database of calls that we are constantly updating, it will be possible to make a reasonable determination of what may be needed. Whatever decision is made, it will be based on facts and designed with the welfare of our communities as the highest priority.