

Brenham Fire Department

2010 Annual Report



Serving Proudly Since 1867



Services Provided

The Brenham Fire Department provides first-responder fire suppression, technical rescue and hazardous materials mitigation services within its primary response district, which includes the area within the City limits of Brenham and an unincorporated area roughly twice that size lying outside of the City limits.

The Brenham Fire Department also provides first responder rescue services to all of Washington County and lends automatic mutual aid assistance to the six (6) adjacent rural Fire Departments on all structure fire calls. Mutual aid is provided to all ten (10) county Fire Departments, when requested.

The Brenham Fire Department maintains the level of staff training and equipment needed to respond to calls for cardiac emergencies in the event that Washington County EMS and County First Responder resources are unavailable. It should be noted that this level of response has occurred very infrequently in the past and that no such responses were needed in 2010.

Brenham Fire Department personnel also perform smoke detector service checks, home fire safety assessments, pre-incident planning surveys, fire prevention & fire safety education programs, and flood water removal services within the City.

The Brenham Fire Marshal's Office provides fire inspection services, fire code enforcement, construction plan review, fire prevention education programs and juvenile fire setter intervention services to the community. As a law enforcement agency, the Fire Marshal's Office conducts investigations of criminal activity related to fires & explosions and enforces state and local statutes on arson, criminal mischief, fire-related offenses and fireworks violations. The Fire Marshal's Office has three (3) licensed Texas Peace Officers who are currently commissioned as Arson Investigators.

In addition to the duties related to operating a full service emergency response agency, the members of the Brenham Fire Department also own and operate the Fireman's Training Center. This popular facility provides an important service to the community and is utilized year-round for social and business events.

Brenham Fire Department operations are closely allied with the City's emergency management system, with the Fire Chief also serving as the Emergency Management Coordinator for the City. The designated emergency operations center (EOC) for both the City and County is housed within the Brenham Fire Department Administrative Offices (see Emergency Management below).

Staffing

During calendar year 2010, staffing of the Brenham Fire Department included **15** full time employees and approximately **45** volunteer members. The staffing structure of the Fire Department is a well integrated mix of full time employees and non-salaried volunteer members.

The Brenham Fire Department operates under the direction of Fire Chief Ricky Boeker, a 22 year BFD veteran. In addition to his duties as head of the Fire Department, Boeker also serves as Emergency Management Coordinator for the City of Brenham.

The Deputy Fire Chief/Fire Marshal performs a combination of administrative and operations-related duties under the direction of the Fire Chief, while also performing the duties of City Fire Marshal which include fire code enforcement, plans review, public fire education, fire prevention inspections, and fire & arson investigations. The Brenham Fire Marshal's Office is a law enforcement agency as defined by Texas statutes and has three (3) licensed Texas peace officers who are commissioned as arson investigators, including the Fire Marshal, one shift Captain and one volunteer firefighter.

There are twelve (12) full-time uniformed staff members who are assigned to shift duty at the fire station. A Captain and three (3) Apparatus Operators are assigned to each of three shifts, working a 48 hour on/96 hour off duty schedule. Shifts are fully staffed (4 on duty) approximately 65% of the time. The minimum staffing level is three (3) paid staff members on duty.

The number of on-duty paid staff members increased from three per shift to four per shift in January of 2010 when three (3) additional Apparatus Operators were hired. **In June of 2009, Brenham was awarded \$325,140 in matching funds for hiring three additional full time personnel.** This increase in personnel is partially funded under the 2008 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (S.A.F.E.R.) grant from FEMA. These new positions represent the first increase in full time paid staff since 1978.

The Fire Department secretary works a normal business schedule (8-5, M-F) in the Fire Department administrative office and handles various office duties as well as serving as the receptionist.

The Brenham Fire Department is chartered by the State of Texas for a maximum of fifty (50) volunteer members. Volunteer firefighter membership normally runs between 40 and 45 at any given time. Within the volunteer membership, four members are elected annually to tactical officer positions (2 Assistant Chiefs and 2 District Chiefs) along with a Secretary-Treasurer, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer, Chaplain and Mascot.

Funding

Brenham Fire Department operations are supported in large part by the General Fund of the City of Brenham. The annual budget appropriation for the Fire Department in fiscal year 2009-10 was \$1,431,034. Donations from the community, along with grant funding, help to supplement these budgeted funds and allow for the purchase of additional equipment, supplies and services.

The Brenham Fire Department has historically received an annual sum of \$5,500 from Washington County in consideration of fire suppression and rescue services provided in the County, outside of the City of Brenham. During their annual budget preparation process in 2010, the County Commissioners Court approved an increase in that amount to \$20,500 for the current County fiscal year (2011).

Fundraisers such as the annual Fireman's Fiesta and Fish Fry are other sources of supplemental revenue. Additionally, the BFD Ladies Auxiliary has been a long-time source of support to the Fire Department. Over the years, the Auxiliary has donated a major portion of their proceeds from the annual cheese log sales and other fund raising activities. These donations have funded numerous projects ranging from the purchase of training materials for the firefighters, equipment for the Training Center and equipment for the Emergency Operations Center. The latest donation from the Ladies Auxiliary was in December of 2010 when a check in the amount of \$5,000 was presented to the BFD membership.

Much of the support from the public is in the form of rental fees for the Fireman's Training Center for social and business events. Revenue generated by this member-owned non-profit enterprise is frequently used to supplement the budgeted resources of the Fire Department.

In 2010 the Fireman's Training Center operation, which has long been a significant source of supplemental funding for various Fire Department projects, was dealt a significant blow when mold was discovered on the walls. The building was shut down during August and September while remediation and remodeling was performed. During this time, nine booked events were moved to other venues. The closure resulted in a loss of rental revenue of \$9,000. The BFD members incurred debt totaling over \$96,000 for the mold remediation and repair work. The cost of this repair work was not covered by insurance. No tax dollars or other public funds were expended on the repairs, as the Training Center is a non-profit entity which is owned by the membership and not a City of Brenham operation.

In addition to the problem of lost rental fees during August and September and the cost of repair work, there was much concern over the further negative revenue impact the closure of the Training Center would have on the annual Brenham Fireman's Fiesta in August.

Fireman's Fiesta 2010

With a building that could not be used and repairs projected to take many months, the forecast for the 2010 Fiesta appeared bleak at best. The Fire Department's goal of generating enough revenue to cover the purchase of a replacement **thermal imaging camera** was in jeopardy. Thermal imaging devices allow firefighters to see in dark and smoky environments and are an invaluable tool when searching for trapped victims inside burning buildings.

The decision was made by the membership to move forward with the Fiesta, although in a much abbreviated format. A one-day event was held on the first Saturday in August and included a BBQ cook-off, antique tractor show & parade, and water polo for those who wanted to beat the August heat.

Due to the support of those who paid to participate in the "mini-Fiesta" and to the generosity of those who supported the event through donations and sponsorships, the Fire Department succeeded in raising enough money to fund the new thermal imaging device in the amount of \$10,500.



Pre-incident Planning Program Exceeds 500 For 2010

Pre-fire planning (“pre-planning”) is a pro-active information oriented activity in which members of the Fire Department visit commercial and industrial occupancies within the City for the purpose of gathering and disseminating information. Pre-planning activities are conducted by on-duty Fire Department staff members, usually during normal business hours.

Pre-planning serves multiple purposes. First, and perhaps most significant, pre-planning allows the Fire Department to gain first-hand knowledge about building construction, the nature of the contents, and the presence of special hazards or specific challenges that firefighters might face during any future emergency response to the location. Information about the building, such as construction type, age, and condition is recorded. Entry points, adjacent exposures, utility connection locations and nearby fire hydrant locations are identified. After-hours contact information is obtained or updated. All of this information is then entered into the master data management system (New World) where it can be accessed by all BFD personnel and shared with other agencies. During a response to a fire or other emergency, the information previously gathered can be accessed via the mobile data terminals on board BFD fire apparatus and command vehicles, providing a higher level of effectiveness and a greater degree of safety for building occupants and for first responders.

Also, during pre-plan tours firefighters share important fire safety information with business operators. Fire Department personnel are often able to inform and advise business operators on a variety of fire safety issues including how to report an emergency, how to properly maintain fire safety systems (such as extinguishers, fire alarm and fire sprinkler systems), and how to identify and mitigate fire hazards that the business operator might not have been aware of. Many times, fire safety issues are pointed out and taken care of right away. At other times, serious hazards or code violations are reported to the Fire Marshal for abatement.

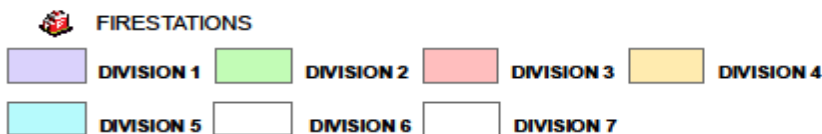
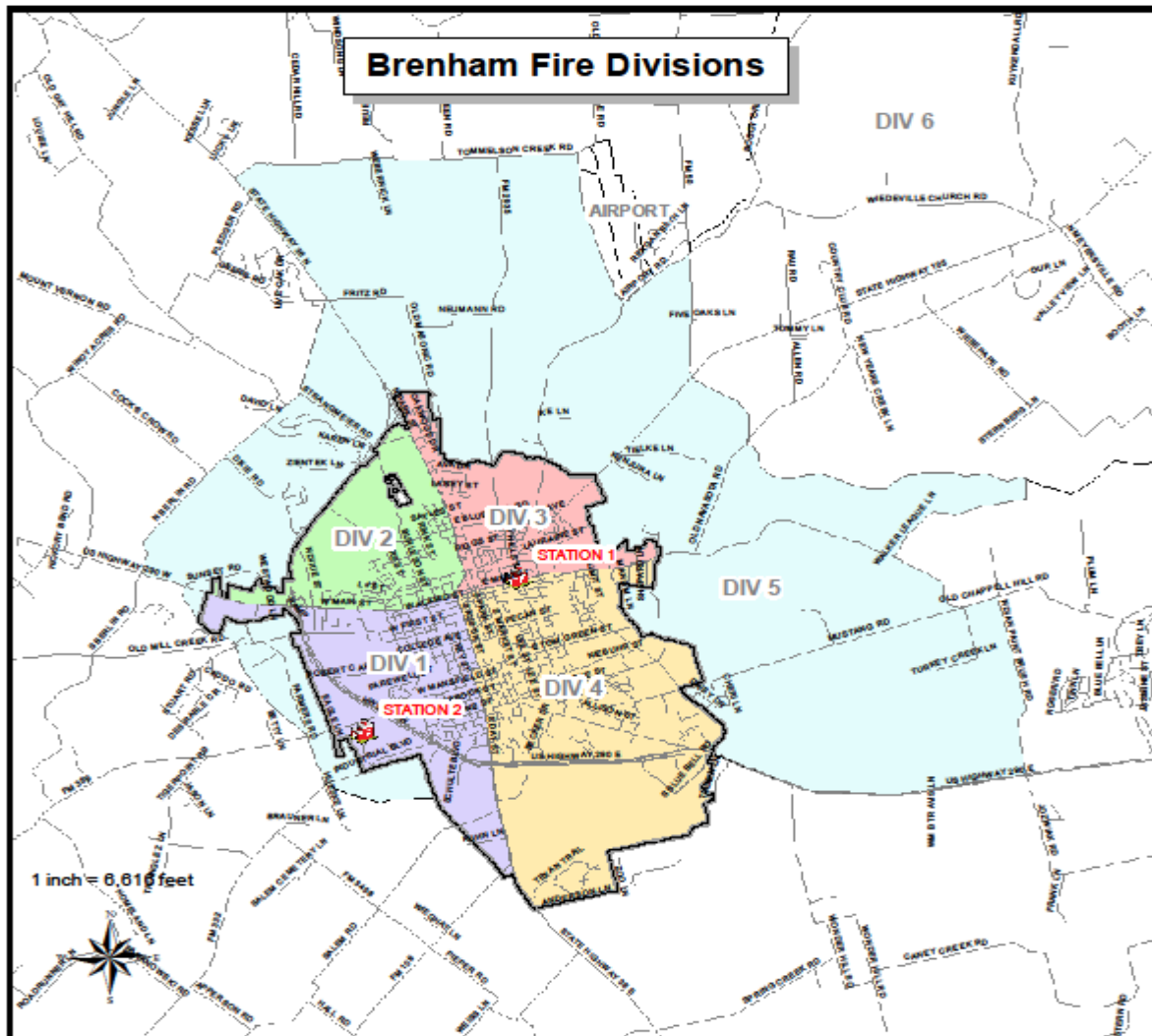
Pre-planning also helps to improve community relations. By its very nature, pre-planning brings firefighters and business operators together in a non-emergency setting where they can discuss the value of fire prevention and fire safety in the business environment.

The pre-planning program also plays a very important role in helping to maintain the City of Brenham’s very low (very good) **Class 3 ISO status**. A low ISO classification has a positive effect on insurance rates for property located within the City limits.

During the ISO study commissioned by the Fire Department in 2005, the consulting fire protection engineer detailed the value of an active pre-fire planning program and indicated that a significant gain in points on the ISO Fire Suppression Rating Schedule could be achieved by such a program. **In 2010, Brenham Fire Department personnel gathered and processed pre-plan information on 562 of the approximately 1,900 businesses and commercial buildings within the City of Brenham.**

Area Served by the Brenham Fire Department

The Brenham Fire Department's **primary response area** covers **36.95** square miles, including 12.28 sq. mi. inside of the City limits and 24.67 sq. mi. of unincorporated Washington County. Divisions 1-4 are inside of the City limits. Division 5 and Division 6 are in unincorporated Washington County. Division 7 is outside of the County. Brenham F.D. is the designated first responding fire department for Divisions 1 through 5.



Brenham
 Square Miles: 12.28
 Acres: 7,862.90

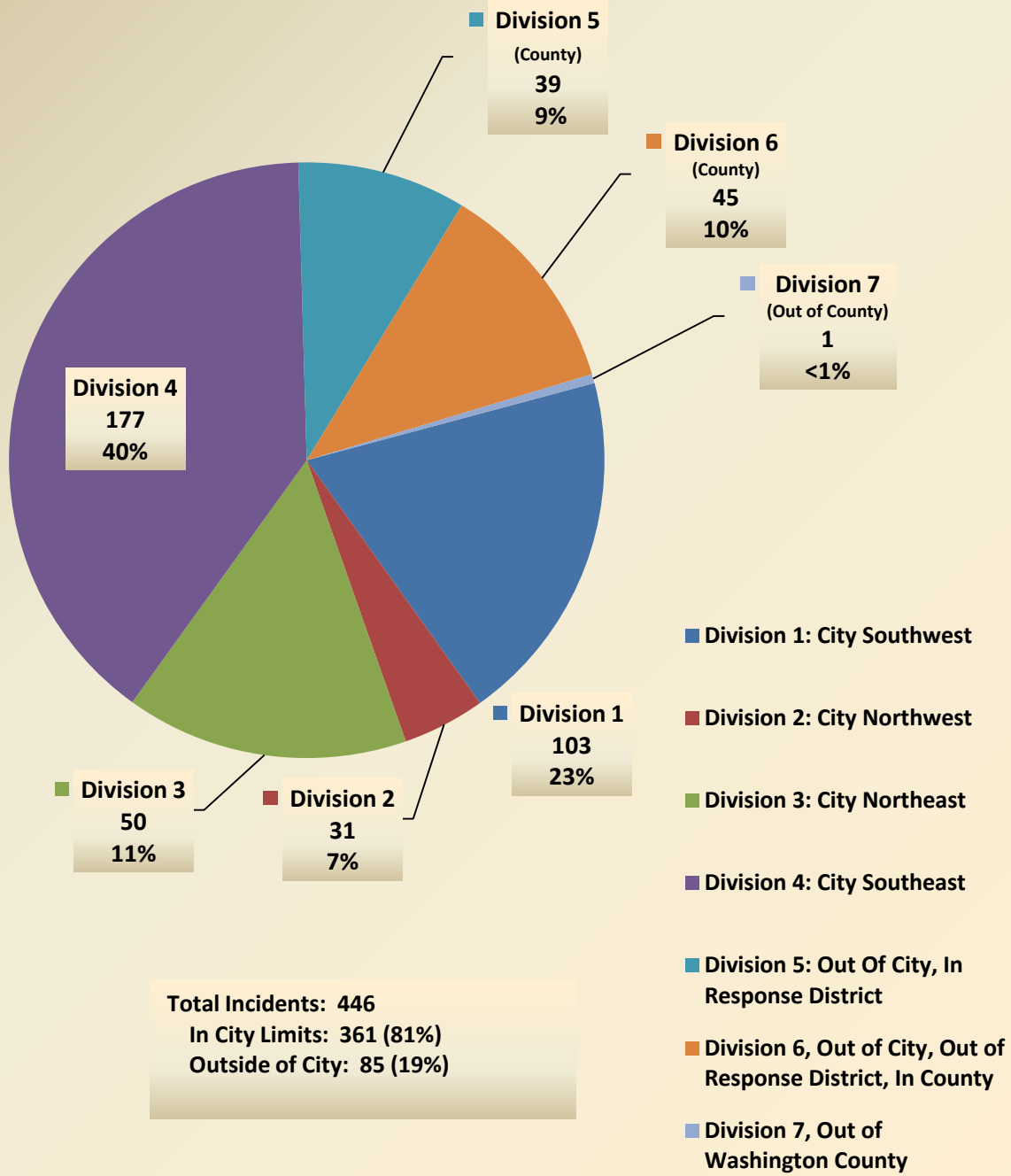
Brenham Fire Primary Coverage in Washington Co.
 Square Miles: 24.4
 Acres: 15,627.06

Airport
 Square Miles: 0.27
 Acres: 173.08

Brenham Fire Department 2010

446 Total Incidents

By Response Division



Calls by Type of Incident Found

Dispatched & cancelled en-route	70
Smoke removal	10
Water removal	4
Hazardous materials	31
Alarm system activation – legitimate	35
False alarms, malfunctions, honest mistakes	97
Smoke scares	26
Medical assists to EMS (other than vehicle crashes)	5
Trash, grass, brush, dumpster fires	37
Vehicle fires	12
Building fires	15
Vehicle crash rescue calls	17
Unauthorized burning	7
Miscellaneous	<u>80</u>
Total	446

County Responses

The Brenham Fire Department responded to **84** incidents in the County in 2010 including fires and rescue calls. Of these, **39 (46%) were to Division 5** as the first responding agency for fires and/or rescues and **45 (54%) were to Division 6** providing mutual aid to other fire departments or for rescue calls. One (1) out of County call was made in 2010, for a car crash rescue in Grimes County.

Total elapsed time for these calls, from the time of dispatch to the time that the Brenham truck(s) arrived back at the fire station was **4,880 minutes**. Additional time needed to return the trucks to service, clean, re-fuel, restore equipment and complete incident reports added an **additional 5,040 minutes** at 60 minutes per call. The grand total of time spent on the 84 County calls was **9,920 minutes**. This comes to **118.10 minutes or 1.96 hours per call**.

Fire Loss Estimates in City in 2010

Fire Loss – City	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
	\$975,250	\$119,150	\$1,061,600	\$450,200	\$300,687

NOTE: Arriving at accurate fire loss value is difficult. When possible, loss figures obtained from insurance carriers (adjusters) are used, and these are considered the most accurate. At other times, loss figures are based on the knowledge and experience of fire investigators. All fire loss figures shown are approximate.

Downtown Building Fire in July



A near century-old downtown landmark was destroyed by fire in the early morning hours of July 15, 2010. The two-story General Production building was located at 111 South St. Charles Street and was part of a block-long string of commercial buildings extending from Alamo to Main Streets and Market to St. Charles Streets.

Despite an aggressive interior attack being halted by a well developed fire involving a large amount of combustible material, BFD firefighters were able to contain the fire to the building of origin. Three of Brenham's "big guns": Ladder 1, Ladder 2 and Engine 4, with a combined pumping capacity of 5,000 gallons per minute, were used to apply heavy streams of water to the fire for nearly 8 hours. Without this type of heavy-duty fire fighting apparatus and the excellent downtown water distribution system to support it, there is little doubt that the fire would have spread through the entire block.

The Berlin and Salem Volunteer Fire Departments answered the call for mutual aid assistance and provided additional manpower to supplement Brenham firefighters. Personnel from the City of Brenham, EMS, Citizens Emergency Response Team, Citizens On Patrol, BFD Ladies Auxiliary, and others assisted throughout the night and the next day. Out of safety concerns for the general public and the risk of damage to other structures from uncontrolled collapse, the owner and insurance carrier agreed to have the building demolished immediately. No civilian injuries were reported and only minor injuries were sustained by firefighters.

Emergency Vehicle Technician Certification Program

For the past 10 years, the Fire Department has invested in specialized training and certification of key personnel in the field of emergency vehicle service and repair. This on-going training initiative, originally conceived by Capt. Allan Hinze the BFD fleet manager, has yielded substantial cost savings when repairs are needed to our fleet of emergency vehicles. This program has saved the City many thousands of dollars in repair and maintenance costs by allowing our certified personnel to make most needed repairs in Brenham. Having to drive or tow fire apparatus to Houston for repair has proven to be extremely costly in the past, as well as involving extended down time, personnel costs for delivery and pick up, and the inherent risk of damage when towing large vehicles in traffic.

"The **Emergency Vehicle Technician Certification Commission, Inc.** is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to improving the quality of emergency vehicle service and repair throughout the United States and Canada by means of a certification program that will provide technicians recognition for the education, training, and experience they have in the service and repair of emergency vehicles."
- <http://evtcc.org/>



The EVTCC Fire Apparatus Technician Certification training program is for technicians who service and maintain fire department pumpers, squads, aerial devices, tankers, wild land apparatus, etc. This training curriculum has three (3) levels of certification, Level 1, Level 2 and Master. Each of the three levels requires the technicians to pass detailed written examinations covering fire apparatus design, performance standards, specialized systems, equipment, and accepted practices used in the service and maintenance of fire apparatus.

The EVTCC program is endorsed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, and meets applicable standards of the National Fire Protection Association for motorized fire apparatus.

During 2010, the Fire Department funded approximately \$2,500 in training for our two (2) EVT-certified personnel which resulted in a saving to the City of just over \$17,000 in repair costs during FY09-10.

Texas Forest Service Rural Volunteer F.D. Assistance Program

This program was created by the 77th Texas Legislature (HB 2604). The Rural VFD Assistance Program provides grants for equipment and training. The Texas Rural Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Program is a cost-share program funded by the Texas State Legislature. It provides funding to rural volunteer fire departments for the acquisition of firefighting vehicles, fire and rescue equipment, protective clothing, county fire radio system components, dry-hydrants, computer systems and firefighter training. Any chartered, non-profit volunteer fire department operated by its members is eligible. Any part-paid/part-volunteer fire department is also eligible provided the number of paid members is 20 or less.

In 2010 we applied for funds to enhance our training library and we received \$6,765 for that project. The Department also received \$4,505 towards the Workers Compensation Coverage for the Volunteers. The Department also received \$4,425 in tuition reimbursement from the Texas Forest Service. The total we received from the Texas Forest Service in 2010 was \$15,695.

The Fire Department continually looks for ways to supplement the annual budget. While the additional revenue sources mentioned above are not huge when viewed in comparison to the overall BFD budget, they demonstrate how the Brenham Fire Department tries to reduce operating costs to our citizens.

S.A.F.E.R. Grant Adds Additional Shift Personnel

In 2008, the Brenham Fire Department was given approval by City Council to submit an application for funds from the "Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response" (S.A.F.E.R.) Grant Program of the Department of Homeland Security. The application was not immediately successful, but during a second round of S.A.F.E.R. Grant awards in the summer of 2009, Brenham was awarded funding in the amount of \$325,140 to be matched by City funds on a five year sliding scale plan. The grant award allowed the City of Brenham to add three (3) additional full-time Apparatus Operators in January of 2010. These additional positions brought the normal duty crew at the fire station up from three to four per shift. This was the first increase in on-duty staff since 1978.

Fire Substation Project

In 2006, City Council authorized a capital improvement project which included a fire sub-station, a new police station and an additional water tower. While the police station and water tower projects both moved to completion, the proposed fire sub-station was not constructed. In 2009, the Fire Department applied for federal grant funding for the sub-station under the Department of Homeland Security "Fire Station Construction Grant Program". An architect was selected and a project budget in the amount of \$2,020,818 was developed. Design work and construction plans were completed for a 7,820 sq. ft. facility, and a site was secured next door to the new police building. However, as of January 2011, no funds for construction have been awarded to Brenham under the grant request, and the project remains unfunded.

Brazos Valley Wide Area Communications System (BVWACS)

In 2008 the City of Brenham joined with Washington County, the cities of College Station and Bryan, A&M University and Brazos County to form the Brazos Valley Wide Area Communication System (BVWACS). The State has mandated that public safety agencies be able to communicate through an interoperability system by the year 2013. BVWACS was formed for the purpose of meeting that mandate. Federal grant funding was used to purchase a portion of the equipment needed to support that system although the majority of the equipment was funded with local City and County funds.

The BVWACS system came on line locally in November of 2010 and as of January 2011 the system is operational for Brenham and Washington County emergency services and other public sector service providers such as road & bridge, utilities, etc. (see Emergency Management below).

No Change in Brenham's ISO "Public Protection Classification"

Brenham's "Public Protection Classification" remained at "3" during 2010. The Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO) provides information to the insurance industry concerning a community's ability to deal with fire. ISO surveys communities in order to establish a "public protection classification" number on a scale from 1 to 10. The lower the ISO classification number the better and lower ISO classifications lead to reduced fire and homeowner's insurance premiums for the rated area.

Numerous items such as fire apparatus, fire department staffing, firefighter training, fire and arson investigation capability, fire codes adopted, water production capability, water main distribution, fire hydrant placement/maintenance, fire alarm receiving and fire dispatching capabilities are surveyed.

Brenham has not been officially surveyed by ISO in nearly ten years, but a mock grading performed by a fire protection consultant in 2005 indicated that without the addition of a fire sub-station on the City's southwest side, the next ISO survey will in all likelihood result in a higher Public Protection Classification rating and subsequent increases in insurance premiums paid in the community.

To date, the City of Brenham has implemented nearly all of the recommendations made in the 2005 study, with the exception of a staffed fire sub-station and the addition of an additional Fire Inspector (Deputy Fire Marshal).

Response Time and Staffing Levels in 2010

It is a major goal of the Brenham Fire Department to have fire engines and sufficient personnel on the scene and ready to commence rescue and fire attack operations within 4 to 9 minutes of being dispatched. This time frame is critical to enabling first-arriving firefighters to rescue trapped or incapacitated occupants of a burning building prior to flash-over of the fire. Flash-over is the point at which all surfaces within a room (or rooms) ignite in vigorous combustion and survival of any trapped occupants cannot be expected. Flash-over can occur in as little 3 to 6 minutes after a fire breaks out in an ordinary non-sprinklered building or home. [Note: buildings equipped with a fire sprinkler system typically never reach the point of flash-over due to the rapid interruption of the fire by the water spray from the sprinklers].

This performance goal is consistent with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 and 1720 standards on staffing and deployment of fire suppression forces. The 1710 standard is applicable to fully staffed fire departments and the 1720 standard is geared to all-volunteer or rural departments. The Brenham Fire Department, being a combination paid and volunteer organization, lies somewhere between the two standards, with elements of both being applicable and attainable.

Response time is defined by NPFA as the time interval between completion of the dispatching process and the arrival of the first fire apparatus on scene, AND with sufficient personnel to begin rescue or fire attack operations (a minimum of 1 engine and 4 personnel arriving within 4 minutes). The minimum staffing level for a full first alarm assignment to a structure fire is no less than 2 engines and 16 personnel, all arriving on the scene within 9 minutes, 90% of the time. In 2010, the Fire Department was able to achieve 4-minute response times only about 50% of the time, which is consistent with figures from the past several years.

In 2010, **77% of in-city responses were to Divisions 1 and 4**, which lie in the southern portion of the City. This area of sustained growth and development has long been the acknowledged target area for construction of a fire sub-station which would serve to reduce the travel distance required to reach the busiest fire response areas in town and thereby reduce the response time to those locations.

It should be noted that as residential development such as houses, apartments and hotels continues to increase in the southwest (Division 1) and southeast (Division 4) quadrants of the city, the challenge of maintaining effective response times will become more difficult. Long response times due to distance from the fire station reduce our ability to perform effective rescues of trapped occupants and increases the likelihood of encountering well developed fires upon arrival. Rapid intervention is the key to successful rescue and effective fire suppression; the key to rapid intervention is to have fire suppression resources dispersed throughout the community rather than housed in a single fire station. In Brenham's case, the need for the southwest fire sub-station has been well documented for decades, and the proposed location remains a viable one.

Fire Prevention, Code Enforcement, Investigations

The following is a summary of fire prevention, public fire education, code enforcement, and fire/arson investigation activity for the year 2010.

Public Fire Prevention Education Programs

The combination of public fire education presentations by the Fire Marshal and other BFD staff members, fire station tours, County Fair presentations, National Night Out visits, fire prevention programs in the schools, requests for employee training from businesses and industries, and other such programs, resulted in approximately 7,500 public contacts in 2010. The bulk of the public contacts were school children in grades Pre-K through 3rd. Virtually all school children in Brenham from Pre-K through the 3rd grade were participants in live fire safety programs presented by the Fire Marshal and other BFD staff members, at various times during the year. Most programs are presented in October as National Fire Prevention Month is observed.

Fire Prevention Poster Contest

The annual State Fireman's & Fire Marshal's Association of Texas (SFFMA) fire prevention poster contest was held in April. The poster contest involves all grades from Pre-K through the 12th grade. Local winners in the various age divisions move to the district level and are judged during the Central Texas District SFFMA spring conference in May. Winners at the district level then move up to the state level and are judged during the SFFMA Annual Training Conference held each June. Brenham had 8 posters place at the district conference in early May and those posters moved on to state level competition in June. Unfortunately, none of the Brenham entries placed at that level.

Inspection, Investigation & Enforcement Activities by Fire Marshal

Fire prevention inspections	234
Requests for code research or ruling	56
Construction plans reviewed	39

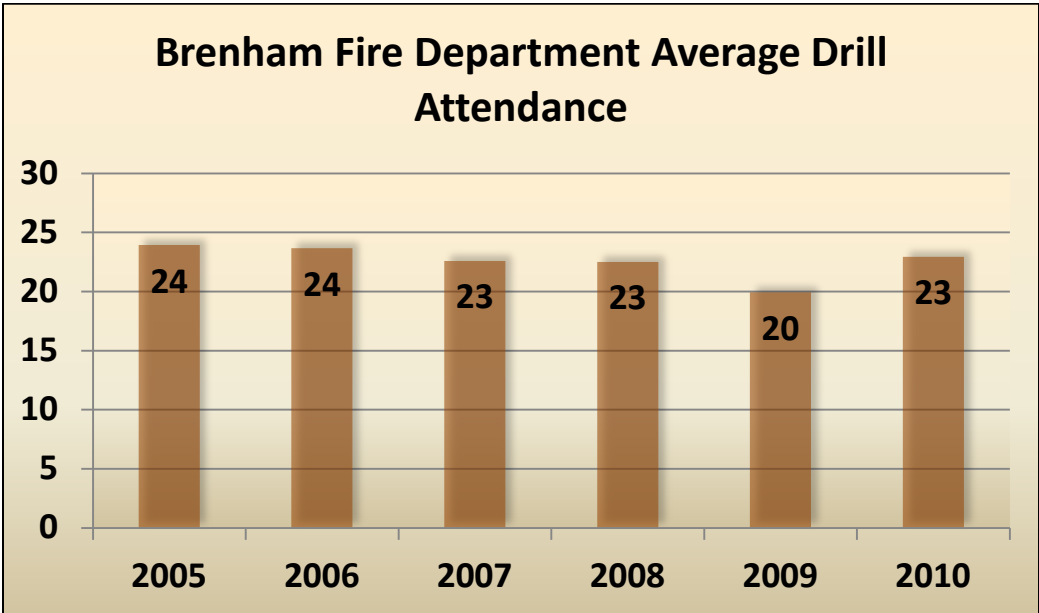
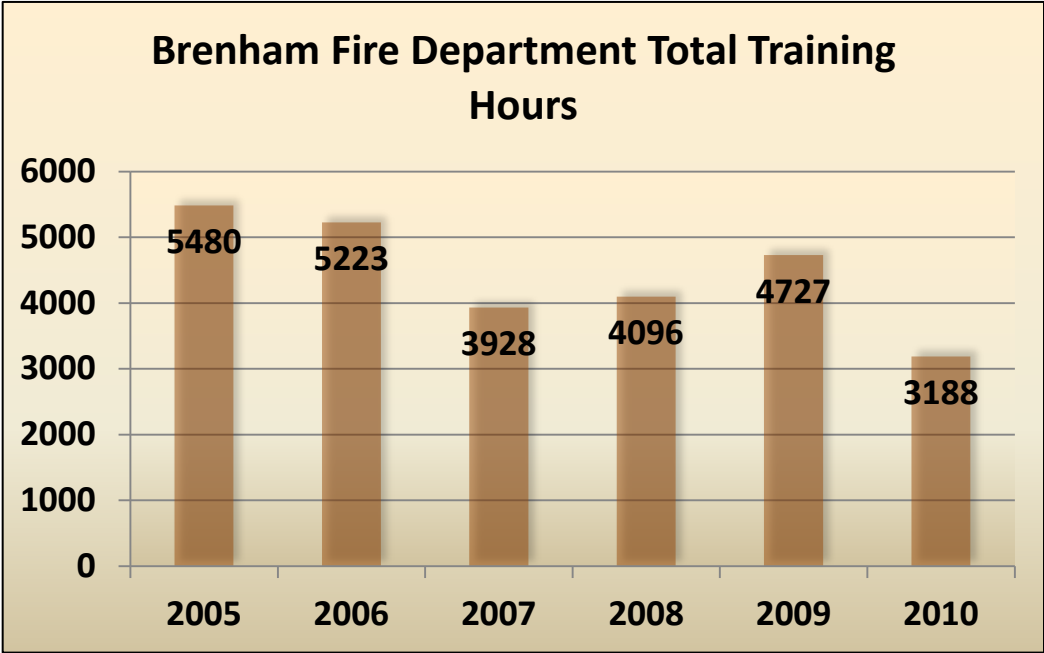
There were no significant arson cases reported to the Fire Marshal in 2010.

2010 Year End Training Report

3188 Total Training Hours for the Department

- 5 Members had 100 hours or more of Training
- 2134 hours trained by Volunteers
- 1054 hours trained by the Career staff.
- 12 Drills held here in Brenham
- **Outside Schools attended by BFD members**
 - Texas Emergency Vehicle Technician Conference – Ft Worth Texas, TX
 - Texas Arson Investigators Seminar – Austin, TX
 - Southwest Fire & Rescue Conference – Galveston, TX
 - Texas Fireman’s Spring Training School – College Station, TX
 - Texas Fireman’s Summer Training School – College Station, TX
 - Fayette County Firefighters Association Training Day – La Grange, TX
 - SFFMA Training Conference & Convention – Corpus Christie, TX
 - Swift Water Rescue Technician Training – New Braunfels, TX
 - Katy Extrication School – Katy, TX
 - Online Training: EMT, Fire Officer I, Fire Office II, Instructor I, Driver Operator
- **BFD Hosted Schools**
 - NIMS Compliance Classes for City, County, & Private Industry
 - Washington County Junior Leadership
 - Brenham Police Department Citizens Police Academy
 - Fire Extinguisher classes for local businesses
 - National Fire Academy Report Writing Class
 - New World Training
 - Washington County Leadership
 - CPR Classes
 - Hurrevac Software Training
 - Emergency Management Group Training
 - City of Brenham Hazard Assessment for Water & Waste Water Treatment Plants
 - Scott & White Emergency Management Training Drill
- **Training Funds Dispersed**

Fiscal Year 09-10 Budgeted Funds	\$22,500.00
Expenses (travel, tuition, memberships, etc.)	<u>20,089.61</u>
Balance	\$2,410.39
Grant Revenue Received	\$3,825.00
Balance	<u>\$6,235.39</u>





The Emergency Management Division provides protection for the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Brenham, particularly in times of disaster. This is accomplished through:

- Effective contingency planning.
- Coordination of local agencies
- Education of the public
- Provision of emergency information services
- Renovating of Emergency Operation Center
- Training of staff in disaster preparedness

The City's Emergency Management Division is responsible for coordinating all components of the emergency management system in the city. These include fire, police, public works, public utilities, volunteers and other groups contributing to the management of major emergencies or disasters. The EMC also works closely with county agencies and organizations, Emergency Medical Services, the Washington County Sheriff's Office and state agencies to coordinate emergency management services and to ensure the safety of all residents within the city and county.



Weather was once again on the forefront for Emergency Management in 2010. While the city didn't see some of the natural disasters it has dealt with in the past few years, extremely dry conditions again threatened the area, with Washington County being included in a statewide disaster declaration. A day prior to the declaration, 11 fire departments spend over 12 hours battling a fire that eventually consumed 122 bales of hay.

Two important goals of Emergency Management were met this past year, both designed to improve the department's ability to communicate with the public and first responders.

In February, the City contracted with Blackboard Connect, an online notification system designed to communicate with citizens through phones, emails and text messaging. The system, which can be used to notify residents of everything from an imminent disaster to road closures, adds one more tool for ensuring public safety.

The long awaited area-wide communications system was implemented in November, bringing to fruition a project that is designed to improve radio interoperability within the County and region. The communications system will allow local emergency responders to talk with their counterparts in the Brazos Valley as well as Harris County.

And while the Emergency Operations Center was not called upon to be used for its primary function, it still saw action this past year. A total of 62 events were held there, from emergency management meetings to city and fire department training classes. In addition, the Fire Department's conference room was used 18 times for general meetings.

