

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A FIRE SERVICE CAREER

Distributed by the City of Oakland Office of Personnel and The Oakland Fire Department

This brochure provides an overview of the City of Oakland's firefighter job and some ways to prepare for the examination. Please read this material carefully because it contains a great deal of valuable information. Although the information presented here describes the City of Oakland's Firefighter Trainee examination, it also offers general information that may be helpful in pursuing a career in the fire services in other jurisdictions as well. The hiring process for entry-level Firefighter is very competitive and requires much effort.

OVERVIEW OF JOB

A career in the fire service is both challenging and rewarding. Firefighting is only one of a wide variety of duties performed by firefighters. Approximately 75% of all fire department responses are to emergency medical calls. Other assignments may include fire prevention education, commercial and residential fire inspections, community outreach, salvage and cleanup after fires, and equipment maintenance. When fighting fires, firefighters wear work clothes and equipment that weighs about 45 pounds. Quite a bit of time is spent inspecting, cleaning, and maintaining this equipment. A firefighter is usually a member of a four or five person team that lives and works together in close quarters throughout a shift. Living at a firehouse includes housekeeping, cooking, cleaning and yard maintenance duties. A crew or team usually includes women and men of different ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds. Each member depends on and expects fellow team members to share in getting the work completed in a timely manner. Firefighting is 24-hour work done in shifts that vary by jurisdiction. Calls for assistance are received around-the-clock. An Oakland firefighter works a 24-hour shift followed by 48 hours off-duty between shifts. Shifts include weekdays, weekends and holidays.

GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS

To apply for Oakland's Firefighter Trainee testing process you must be at least 18, have a valid California driver's license, a good driving record, and an education equivalent to high school graduation.

A firefighter must have good judgment, communication skills, mechanical aptitude, basic math skills, and the ability to understand and learn fire-fighting material. In addition, a firefighter must be able to face hazardous, life-threatening conditions, and be able to deal with unpleasant and difficult situations. Firefighters must have excellent "people" skills and be able to work well under stress. At the same time, they must be team players who can get along with a variety of people in close quarters. The ability to follow orders and work in a paramilitary organization is also important. Firefighting is physically demanding and you must be in excellent physical condition. Oakland firefighters are drug tested on an annual basis and may be required to take an annual physical agility fitness test.

SELECTION PROCESS

The first part of the selection process is a detailed job analysis of the position. The results of the job analysis assisted the City of Oakland in determining minimum qualifications for the job and in developing an appropriate job related selection process. This process includes a written test, a physical agility work sample test and an oral interview. If you are successful in the written, physical agility and oral interview, and are considered for employment you will also be required to successfully complete a

medical examination (including a drug test), psychological assessment, and background investigation. Everyone who successfully completes the training academy is a probationary employee for 18 months. The complete application and testing process is described in the announcement.

Most jurisdictions distribute an announcement describing the testing process. To get specific information about other agencies, contact their personnel office. Most tests for entry-level firefighter include application screening, a written examination, a physical agility test, and one or more oral interviews.

RESIDENCY ZONE

Firefighter Trainee is an emergency responder job. As of February 1, 1996, anyone hired by the City of Oakland into emergency responder job, are required, by the first day of employment, to reside and continue to reside, during the course of employment in that job, in a residency zone that includes areas that are approximately ten miles from the geographic center of Oakland. This does not include areas connected by major bridges.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREPARE NOW

Becoming a firefighter often takes a great deal of long-term preparation, self-motivation, and commitment. While there is no guarantee that any of the following suggestions will guarantee your success, experience has shown that these kinds of activities distinguish the best candidates and show your interest in the job.

Additional Education and Training Opportunities

Although advanced education is not a minimum requirement to be a firefighter, there are several types of Fire Science or related certificates and degrees available in the Bay area. Although these courses may not be listed on a job announcement as minimum application requirements, they show that you are serious and motivated. These classes also provide important knowledge and exposure to many aspects of the job of a firefighter. Some current classes and programs are listed below. Check with the organization providing the classes to get information about fees and schedules.

First Aid Courses

The Oakland office of the American Red Cross offers several courses in Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and First Aid. The toll free number for class schedules is 1-800-520-5433.

- Advanced First Aid Certificate
- Professional Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) Certificate

Fire Service Technology Courses

- Fire Science A.A. Degree: Beginning in September, 1996, Oakland's Laney College will offer a Fire Science degree program. For information about this program or summer tutorial courses please call (510) 436-2419.
- Other Bay area programs are located at: San Francisco City College, Chabot College, Los Medanos Community College

State Certification

- For information concerning California State Fire Science Certification Courses contact the State Fire Marshal's Office at (916) 262-1870.

Firefighter I Academy:

- Chabot College; Butte College
- Las Positas Community College, 3033 Collier Canyon Road, Livermore, CA 94550
- Solano Community College, 4000 Suisun Valley Road, Suisun, CA 94585

Fire Service Related Courses (offered at community colleges)

- Emergency Medical Technician Certification
- Basic Math
- Auto Mechanics and Auto Maintenance
- Basic English Grammar and Reading Comprehension

Physical Fitness

It is important to have and maintain a physical fitness program. No one course of physical fitness training will suit every individual. However, if your private physician approves, a physical training program that stresses endurance and total body strength may help you to succeed in physical agility performance testing and on the job.

Several institutions may assist you in selecting a physical fitness program: the community colleges; the YWCA/YMCA; a private health club; or a health maintenance organization (for example Kaiser Permanente). If possible, bring a description of anticipated physical agility exercises when you meet with your trainer or physician.

Community Involvement

Participation in volunteer programs establishes a record of interest and motivation.

Volunteer Fire Service Work

- Office of Emergency Services (OES)
- California Conservation Corp (CCC)
- California Department of Forestry (CDF)

Volunteer Community Services

- Church Programs
- Scout Troops (Explorer)
- Community Organizations
- Hospitals
- Schools

Miscellaneous

There are other job opportunities in the fire services. Civilian positions are sometimes available in dispatch, administration, or fire prevention. Most jurisdictions have a recorded job information hot-line that lists vacancies. For Oakland, that number is (510) 238-3112. Employment as a paramedic, nurse, medical assistant, or in other direct service in an emergency environment is helpful.

Visit Fire Stations

This is an excellent opportunity to talk to firefighters and discuss the profession and determine if it matches your skills and interests.

Develop a Resume

Develop a resume that includes all Fire Service related information so it is easily available when applications are accepted.

The Oakland Fire Department encourages everyone seeking a career in the fire services to carefully consider their interests, skills and abilities to determine their level of aptitude for the fire fighting profession. Oakland is seeking well-prepared, motivated individuals to join its ranks of professional and well-trained firefighters.

START YOUR EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL FITNESS TRAINING NOW!

Mission Statement

The City of Oakland is committed to the delivery of effective, courteous, and responsive services. Citizens and employees are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect. Civic and employee pride are accomplished through constant pursuit of excellence and a work force that values and reflects the diversity of the Oakland community.

*City of Oakland
Office of Personnel
Employment & Classification Division
150 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, 2nd Floor, Oakland, CA 94612*