

Keowee Fire Department improves its ISO rating

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SALEM — One year to the day after moving into its brand new fire station, the Keowee Fire Department was informed it had improved its ISO rating from a split 5/9 to a solid 4, Chief Richie Caudill announced to his staff Friday.

"You guys put in a lot of work to get this rating," Caudill said among hearty cheers from his firefighters. "This year we did the most training in the history of the fire department."

Keowee's previous ISO inspection occurred in 2003, and yielded a rating of five for much of the district, but the lack of a station within five

miles of the Waterford and Waterford Point area on Lake Keowee produced a rating of nine in that region.

In 2008, the Keowee Fire Department moved into its new central fire station and also completed a sub-station off Doug Hollow Road, providing better coverage for the entire special tax district.

"We've made this district balanced," Caudill said. "We've shown we treat everybody in this district the same."

Keowee Fire had improved in all categories in the inspection, including handling of fire alarms, the fire department itself and water supply. Caudill attributed the improved score in handling fire alarms

to increased efficiency at the county level in dispatching.

"Travis Tilson and the guys at dispatch have made huge strides," he said.

Caudill said the jump from a nine to a four rating could mean big insurance savings for those in the Waterford area, but acknowledged that a one-point improvement may not be as significant in the rest of the district. He urged Keowee residents to contact their insurance providers to see how the new rating would affect rates.

Tom Almus, a volunteer with the department, said regardless of financial benefit, the ISO score serves as a positive "report card" for Keowee.

"We're giving homeowners

the message that our firefighters are getting better at protecting life and property," Almus said.

Caudill said the grade of four might stand for a while, given that the areas most needing to change to make another jump would be an increase in manpower and training, neither of which are inexpensive propositions.

"Where they say we're weak, we'll probably stay weak for a while," he said. "But we'll continue to look at this every year to see how we can improve down the road."

Keowee is now one of 126 Class Four fire departments in the state of South Carolina, and one of 4,403 in the United States.