# New fire stations going up in Pickens County



Firefighter Kendall Rampey, left, and Chief Michael Barrett examine a fire truck at the Six Mile Rural Fire District's new station. KEN OSBURN/STAFF

## More protection, lower insurance rates will help

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Pickens residents could see improvements in fire protection and response times as well as reductions in their insurance rates due to fire stations being built in rural fire districts in the county.

County Administrator Chappell Hurst said the stations are being built "for the safety and welfare of the citizens" and can improve ISO (Insurance Services Office) ratings, which can lower people's home insurance premiums.

"If you don't have the appropriate number of stations or the proximity to these residences to properly cover them you could jeopardize the safety of your citizens," Hurst said.

"We've been working on this for some time," he said. "This is not something that you can do overnight because it just takes time. It's a very large undertaking and a major undertaking in how the county views emergency services."

The Six Mile Rural Fire District has a new station on State 133 and the Pickens, Liberty and Rocky Bottom districts will construct new stations this year, Hurst said. He said the Crosswell Fire District is considering building a new station as well.



Kendall Rampey, a firefighter with the Six Mile Rural Fire District, checks controls on a fire truck at the district's new station.
KEN OSBURN/STAFF

"In most all of these fire districts there need to be some additional substations in order to meet the new ISO requirements," Hurst said. "They're basically all looking at some expansion."

There are 14 rural fire districts in the county, according to Chuck Haynes, emergency management director for Pickens County.

### New stations

Haynes said in the Pickens district, new stations will be on Wilson Way near State 8 across from the state Department of Motor Vehicles, on Fox Squirrel Ridge Road and on property the county owns along Shady Grove Road where county public works is located.

The property has been purchased, and construction will begin after July 1 for the stations in the Pickens district.

Hurst said property has also been purchased for a new station in the Liberty Rural Fire District, which will be off U.S. 178 and Breazeale Road.

"The plans have been developed, and we're now in the process of getting the permits so that we can do the grade work for the station," he said.

Construction will start as soon as the permits are acquired, Hurst said.

Another station was also built about two years ago in the Liberty district along U.S. 178 near the Anderson County line.

The Rocky Bottom Rural Fire District, which sits in northern Pickens County, doesn't have a fire station, Haynes said. He said the district contracts with the Holly Springs fire district and is also assisted by the Vineyards fire district.

Hurst said, "The terrain in that area is the challenge."

Plans call for a new station to be built off U.S. 178 south of Rocky Bottom Road, Haynes said. The county and property owner are in the midst of working out a lease agreement, he said.

When the station is built,

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volunteer firefighters who live in the community can respond to fires and will also still get assistance from the Holly Springs and Vineyard fire districts.

## Public safety

Haynes said the new stations will mean the "availability of public safety services closer to the properties, which will lead to faster response times."

Hurst said if there's a vehicle accident or something else that occurs, "these folks will be in a closer proximity to the majority of our population."

He said, "When somebody is seriously injured in a car accident, to be able to get there as quick as possible can be the difference in saving their life or not."

Hurst said most rural fire districts are funded through an annual fire fee that property owners in the district pay, and construction of the new stations as well as equipment and staffing are all paid for through that fee.

He said in a few districts property owners pay through taxes with an annual tax rate for their fire district.

The new stations will be staffed with a combination of volunteers and paid staff, Hurst said.

Six Mile Fire Chief Michael Barrett said their new fire station has more room, particularly for training. The move centered the station in the fire district, he said.

"It's going to help insurance rates," he said. "Also it does show progress in the fire department.... It's actually upgrading the fire department, upgrading the service of the station."

Hurst said there have been changes in the way the ISO looks at a coverage area as well.

"It used to be that they used a straight line radius to determine where the five-mile area was from the fire station," he said. "Now it is based on road mileage since GPS has come into play."

Hurst said homes that were in the five-mile radius might not be anymore. For homeowners outside the radius, it can mean being unable to get fire insurance coverage or only having access to extremely expensive coverage, he said.

## The economics

Ralph Guarino, finance director for Pickens County, said the cost for a new fire station ranges from around $300,000 to $550,000. Hurst said the cost depends on whether it's a main station with training facilities and sleeping quarters or a smaller substation.

To help pay for new fire stations, equipment and personnel, some rural fire districts saw fire fee increases in the 2012-13 budget, Guarino said.

Liberty went from $86 to $106 a year for a residential property owner, with the cost varying for commercial properties depending on square footage. Pickens went from $50 to $75 a year for a residential property owner, and commercial rates didn't change.

Six Mile went from $51 to $65 a year for a residential property owner in the unincorporated area, with the cost varying for commercial properties depending on square footage. The $65 fee was new for residential property owners in the incorporated town of Six Mile because they paid in millage through the town before, Guarino said.

Hurst said Rocky Bottom hasn't seen an increase yet.

Haynes said a large portion of Pickens in the rural areas is in the higher categories of the ISO rating.

"We've looked at the amount of money to be spent versus the amount of money to be saved," he said. "What we're looking at is probably anywhere, 15 to 30 percent savings per year on their insurance premiums" for those in the higher ISO rating categories.

Hurst said the new stations can also help property values and financing for homes.

"If you don't have a fire station within five miles it's harder to sell your property," he said. "If they're going to borrow money you