

### **What is the fire benefit charge?**

The 1987 Washington State Legislature passed RCW 52.18.030. This statute provides that fire districts, with the approval of the voters in the district, are authorized to collect a benefit charge from residential and business property owners. The law provides that the benefit charge shall be reasonably proportioned to the benefits received by the property resulting from the services provided by the fire district. This is referred to as a "benefit charge." The benefit charge is not a per call charge and is not based on property value. The benefit charge is a fee which is based on the benefit of having fire protection. The county assessor's office sends the county treasurer's office the data on properties, which is then collected by the county treasurer's office along with the property tax bill.

### **How will a fire benefit charge provide a better source of funding for the Fire District?**

The benefit charge is a fairer way of funding the district's fire service. Property taxes only take into consideration the value of the property and not the benefits provided by the fire district. These benefits include lower fire insurance costs which are passed on to the homeowner. By using a benefit charge, costs will be more fairly distributed.

### **Who establishes the fire benefit charge and what does it cover?**

RCW 52.18.030 provides that the Board of the Fire Commissioners may fix and impose a benefit charge on personal property and improvements to real property. The benefit charge does not apply to land. The benefit charge would cover such property as residential buildings, commercial structures, agricultural buildings, and other structures affixed to the land.

The statute also provides for certain exemptions, which include:

- A. Personal property not used in business.
- B. Property that is the subject of a contract for services with the district, including publicly owned buildings.
- C. Any property used for religious purposes by a recognized religious organization, including educational facilities.
- D. Property that maintains its own fire department.

### **How much revenue will be available from the fire benefit charge?**

The statute states that the total amount that can be raised by a benefit charge cannot exceed 60% of the operating budget. If a fire district enacts a benefit charge it must reduce its maximum regular property tax levy from \$1.50 to \$1.00 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

### **How will a fire benefit charge help the average homeowner?**

It provides a continued level of dependable fire service by maintaining well equipped firefighters; and because homeowners have a regular voice in the benefit charge, they will have greater control over the cost of their fire service.

### **How long is the fire benefit charge good for?**

The benefit charge law provides for annual public hearings and must be put to the voters for renewal every six years.