

Good Afternoon, My Name is John Hejl and I am the fire chief in Casselton ND.

Casselton Fire is 100% volunteer. We cover an area of 385 sq miles – 12 townships and the cities of Casselton and Amenia or 5000 ND residents as primary fire. That area almost doubles to 745 for Extrication. Beyond Emergency services Fire departments across the state also put on fire extinguisher demonstrations, fire safety classes, give tours to our youth, and are the authority having jurisdiction for fire inspections and occupancy permits. It is busy, it's a lot. But we signed up for this.

Volunteer and Career departments across the state pull funding from a variety of sources; grants, taxes, general funds of cities and townships, and all too often donations and fundraisers. Those funding sources should mirror their uses. Career or volunteer, metro or rural you will be hard pressed to find two identical departments. At Casselton Fire roughly 1/3 of our call volume comes from Casselton, 1/3 from our rural addresses, and 1/3 from Interstate 94 of which we cover 33 Miles; from Mapleton to Tower City. If we only covered Casselton we would focus spending on Engines and Ladders. If we only covered rural areas we would focus on Grass Rigs and Tankers. The Interstate and the State Highways that run through our area make us also focus on extrication and dealing with hazardous situations and substances that would otherwise not be an issue in our area. Our funding structure follows this call volume and equipment needs matrix in that the city contract is 1/3, our townships and Amenia are 1/3, and our state insurance rebate is 1/3 of our budget.

Once again, 1/3 of Casselton Fire Department's annual budget comes from our state insurance rebate. We have come to rely on the insurance fund money not because we want it, but because we need it. Each biennium we lobby for a continuing appropriation as we have to decide if we can purchase what we need or if we will have to wait, unsure of the funding we will receive.

As volunteer responders in Casselton we are not asking for insurance rebate funds for a pay increase, but rather to provide current/safe tools, apparatus, and PPE for our firefighters.

To help quantify the things I listed at the beginning of this speech. In 2021 Casselton fire spent 621 hours and 15 minutes on emergency scenes. In 2022 it was 569 hours and 19 minutes. That is only time spent on scene. For each hour spent on scene add an additional 3 hours of "department time"; drive time to and from emergencies, time spent after getting apparatus and tools ready for service, add Classroom and training time, business meetings, public education, building inspections, daycare and school tours, city and township meetings and speaking here today... the list goes on.

Our time is limited as firefighters and needs to be spent on these things. Please make our insurance rebate a continuing appropriation so that we can do so in a safe manner with current tools and PPE.

Thank You

John Hejl
Chief, CFD