



How do you become a Firefighter?

Well, there is good news: firefighters are in high demand right now, especially part-time firefighters in Lake County. To get hired as a firefighter, you're going to need to take your training into your own hands.

All Lake County Fire Departments require both firefighting and emergency medical training. They all run emergency medical services (Ambulances), which is why they desire cross-trained personnel.

Career Fire Departments in Illinois ultimately want prospective employees certified in the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal Basic Operations Firefighter and Paramedic (EMT-P). For part-time work, Basic Operations Firefighter is still required, but some may elect to take Emergency Medical Technician Basic (EMT-B). Here is how you can start a path toward a rewarding job in the fire service.

What is Basic Operations Firefighter Certification

First, a few basics: the Basic Operations Firefighter certification is issued by the Office of the State Fire Marshal, and the only current way to obtain it is to attend a fire academy and be affiliated with a fire department. How do you get this without being affiliated with a fire department? Keep reading

What is EMT Certification?

The two levels of EMT certification in Lake County:

1. **Emergency Medical Technician Basic (EMT-B):** EMTs have the knowledge and skills needed to stabilize and safely transport patients for all calls, from routine transports to life-threatening emergencies. They provide treatment onsite and during the ambulance ride to the hospital, such as controlling bleeding, stabilizing breaks, and addressing shock. EMTs perform interventions with the basic equipment typically found on an ambulance.
2. **Paramedic (EMT-P):** Paramedics provide advanced medical care for critical and emergent patients in the EMS system. This includes triage with sophisticated medical equipment and the administration of about 30 different types of drugs.

High School Students

High school students should discuss with their counselors how they can enroll in either the Emergency Medical Services or the Firefighting Class at the Lake County Technology Campus during their senior year. These are both taught at the Lake County Tech Campus in Grayslake. Both classes are taught by real professionals in these fields and are supported by the Lake County Fire Chiefs Association.

Emergency Medical Services (with Ride-along program)

This program prepares students to take the licensure examination of the Illinois Department of Public Health to become an EMT-B. Activities include clinical experiences in a hospital emergency room and riding along with local Fire/EMS departments. Students will learn American Heart Association Healthcare Provider CPR, patient assessment, stabilization, and initial pre-hospital medical treatment of injured and ill patients. Students in this program must be seniors. What will my class be like? Learn how teamwork

can make a lifesaving difference by mastering rescue techniques used by EMTs. You'll practice CPR, patient assessment and stabilization, treatment of injured and ill patients, and patient transportation. Lessons in anatomy show you how the human body works, transforming you into an expert first responder. Work alongside emergency room doctors, nurses, and paramedics in area hospital emergency rooms and fire departments during your required 40-hour internship.

https://youtu.be/cMtdAKJ-r_g

<https://youtu.be/iZJLih6vCKI>

Firefighting (with Ride-along program)

This program is designed to prepare students for entry-level firefighter positions. Skills taught include: understanding fire chemistry, wearing personal protective clothing, identifying ropes, tying knots, using fire extinguishers, performing forcible entry, carrying and raising ladders, operating self-contained breathing apparatus, employing search-and-rescue techniques, working with ventilation tools, and practicing hose evolutions on an operating fire engine. Leadership and communication skills help prepare the student for future certification. What will my class be like? As you train to become a firefighter, you'll learn how to extinguish, confine, or escape from fire. Begin by learning fire suppression, fire chemistry, forcible entry, and search and rescue techniques. Practice what you've learned by performing drills with ropes, ladders, hoses, and a fire engine. Ride along with local fire departments to see the skills you've learned in action. Smoke the competition, become a real-life hero, and climb the ladder to success.

<https://youtu.be/vjhS0QZC49o>

High School Graduates

Consider attending a local community college such as the College of Lake County that offers degrees in Fire Science Technology. Reach out to your college counselor to see which classes are best for you. You can also attend Emergency Medical Technician Basic (EMT-B) classes on your own. These classes are offered at area hospitals; you can contact their EMS office (Emergency Medical Services).

- Northwestern Medicine Lake Forest Hospital Autumn Talley (224) 271-5545, Greg Fuchs (224) 271-4246
- Vista East at 1324 N. Sheridan Road, Waukegan EMT-Basic: (847) 360-2117 EMT-Paramedic: Dave Chase (847) 360-2205
- Advocate Condell Medical Center EMT-Paramedic: Brianna Flynn (847) 990-5319
- NorthShore University Health System EMT-Basic and EMT Paramedic: Pam Pauly (847) 480-2812 (Highland Park Hospital)

College Students

College of Lake County Fire Basic Operations (FBO) Program with Grayslake Fire Department Internship

This is a unique program where students must apply and undergo a selection process. When they complete this program, they will leave college with an associate's degree and have two of the most essential certifications needed for working in a fire department. These two certifications are the Illinois Department of Public Health Emergency Medical Technician (EMT-B) and the Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal Basic Operations Firefighter. In addition to being ready to go, your associate's degree will help you if you choose to become a career firefighter with aspirations of being an officer. Candidates with College degrees typically receive extra points toward promotional exams, giving them a leg up on their competition.

When students graduate from this program, local area fire departments assess them and may offer them part-time positions. These students are highly desirable to fire departments, showing the commitment necessary for firefighter/EMT training.

How the Program Works

When a student enters CLC in the fall, they can start on the degree track for an associate degree in fire science technology. Most students will begin by taking various classes, one being FST 111, Introduction to the Fire Service. This class is all about the career opportunities available in the fire service. Many of the students who come out of FST 111, the prerequisite for the FBO academy, will want to apply to the program. We have crafted a packet in conjunction with Grayslake FD, which is distributed in December each year for the program starting the following August. The student interested in the FBO academy will fill out and return the packet in January. Once all the packets are collected, we review the applicants and schedule an interview in early March to select candidates for the fall FBO program. Those students will also take hazmat operations and Emergency Medical Technician-Basic (EMT-B). Once everything is completed, they will come out of the program with an associate degree in Fire Basic Operations, state certification in FBO, certification in hazmat operations, and a national registry EMT.

The students who desire to choose other avenues of the fire service and look at the fire science technology degree may pursue becoming:

- a fire marshal
- fire inspector
- fire investigator
- public educator
- fire protection engineer
- fire protection service specialist
- wildland firefighter

Contact jhowell@clcollinois.edu for details

Wait a minute...I thought you said the only way to get certified as a Basic Operations Firefighter is to be affiliated with a fire department? How does the College of Lake County do this?

Good question! The College of Lake County has partnered with the Grayslake Fire District in a unique, first-of-its-kind program developed by the two through an intergovernmental agreement. This agreement has the Grayslake Fire District taking on every student in the program as an actual Grayslake Fire District employee. Their uniforms are Grayslake, their gear is Grayslake, and they work inside Grayslake's three fire stations as interns going on actual emergency calls.

21 and Over

Congratulations, you're a good age to be hired, so let's look at what makes a desirable candidate. For the Grayslake Fire District, a candidate who completes the College of Lake County Program is desirable because they have a Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT), are EMT-B certified, and are a state-certified Basic Operations Firefighter. If they plan to pursue a paramedic career, they are even more desirable. If they have a good attitude, a strong work ethic, work well as a team, and can follow instructions, we have the makings of a good firefighter. Someone with all these qualities would be a desirable hire for the Grayslake Fire District and most other area fire departments.

If you haven't come through the College of Lake County program, the first thing you need to do is begin getting in shape. Most fire departments require the CPAT, and if you think you're in shape and don't take this seriously, you might find yourself failing. Passing this test is mandatory, and a valid CPAT card lasts only one year, so stay in shape and keep your card current to get hired.

You should also begin looking for an Emergency Medical Technician Basic (EMT-B) class. There is a cost when you find a program, ask about scholarships or payment plans to help with the class. Once this class is completed, you should investigate the Emergency Medical Technician Paramedic Class (EMT-P). This is the next level for medical training. About halfway through the class, if you're doing well, schedule and pass a CPAT test. Once you have this, start calling fire departments and asking about part-time work. You'll be missing a key component of your training: the Illinois State Certified Basic Operations Class. Still, with CPAT, EMT-B, and a near completion of an EMT-P, you are now desirable for a fire department to work with you attending a fire academy. The academy is where you will work hard and get your Basic Operations Firefighter certification, and with the completed EMT-P, you have completed the basic training you need. With all these components, you can begin testing for full-time fire department jobs throughout Illinois.

35 and Over

If you're looking to become a full-time traditional firefighter, it's probably too late. By state statute, full-time firefighters cannot be hired over the age of 35 unless they are currently with that fire department in a part-time capacity. But you can be employed as a full-time contract firefighter through companies such as METRO Paramedic Services and Paramedic Services of Illinois (PSI). Many fire departments hire Contract firefighters to increase staff, and it is desirable for those over 35 or for young firefighters to gain experience. The wages and benefits are different, but they are always looking for good people to place in fire departments throughout Illinois. Part-time firefighters can also be hired over 35, so look at

the basic training above in the 21-and-over section and get to work. The fire service needs good, hard-working people.

FAQ's

What's the difference between part-time and volunteer?

Volunteer firefighters receive little or no money. Volunteers traditionally work for fire departments that run few calls, but in Lake County, all fire departments run a significant number of calls each year. Because of this, most fire departments in Lake County no longer accept volunteers; instead, they hire part-time firefighters paid by the hour.

Who can you talk to about becoming a firefighter?

If you're interested in the Grayslake Fire District, you can email dctorkilsen@grayslakefire.com. For other Lake County fire departments, you can stop in Monday through Friday or contact them on their non-emergency number. A Google search for your fire department's website, Facebook page, or web page will usually list that non-emergency number. You can also contact them through their social media pages if they have one.