What is the Job?

Firefighters protect communities against the loss of life, injury, and destruction of property by fire. Firefighters work as a team with each person assigned to a special job. They respond to various emergency and non-emergency calls such as fire alarms, different types of fires, public service requests, vehicle accidents, hazardous material situations, and medical aid calls. Some of the duties include locating the source of a fire, connecting hose lines and nozzles, rendering emergency medical care, operating power tools and hand tools, and placing ladders onto buildings to assist with rescue or fire operations. In order to ensure their equipment works properly, firefighters are also responsible for apparatus, fire station, and equipment maintenance.

Working Conditions

Firefighters work indoors and outdoors. They perform work in physically and mentally challenging situations and for prolonged periods of time under dangerous conditions. They are required to eat, sleep, and work at a fire station while on duty, sometimes for a few days at a time. Hours vary but often include being on duty for 24 hours and then being off duty for 24 or 48 hours. Typical municipal firefighters average 56 hours per week, while Federal or State firefighters work 72 hours per week. Firefighters may also be exposed to toxic smoke, gases and fumes, flames, hazardous chemicals, heat, stress, and high levels of noise.

Employment Outlook

Employment prospects as a firefighter in the State of California can vary, since most firefighters tend to stay on the job anywhere from 20 to 40 years. While turnover is not high in most departments, residential and commercial growth can influence the hiring of additional firefighters to staff needed fire stations. Prospects are fairly good for applicants who meet the high health and physical qualifications. Those with a college education may have a better chance. Advancement can be made to Engineer, Captain, Battalion Chief, Assistant Chief, Deputy Chief and Fire Chief.

Earnings Potential

Earnings can vary depending on the type and size of employer, geographic location, and union contract. Larger cities usually pay more than midsize and smaller cities, while usually offering more chances for promotional opportunities and specialty assignments such as fire inspector or fire investigator. Federal and State firefighting personnel earn less pay than municipal or county firefighters. In the Bay Area, entry-level wages range anywhere from $2000 to $6000 per month, and firefighters with several years experience can earn between $4000 to $8000 per month with educational incentives or specialty assignment differentials. In addition to pay, firefighters usually receive excellent benefit packages including a paid retirement plan.

Necessary Qualifications

Firefighters need to have excellent health, physical agility, strength, stamina, manual dexterity, and eye-hand-foot coordination. They need the ability to climb, stoop, and reach; have normal color discrimination; and the ability to lift at least 50 pounds. Firefighters need mechanical abilities to operate equipment. They also need the ability to perform well under stress and have a willingness to risk death or injury. They need to demonstrate emotional stability and self-confidence as well as the ability to work with different types of people under situations of extreme duress. Firefighters also need to have excellent communication skills. High school or college level coursework in math, English, health, geography, chemistry, physical education, computers, and mechanical trades would be helpful.

Career opportunities

Students studying Fire Technology at Chabot College can pursue careers as firefighters, while also preparing themselves for future promotional opportunities. The types of employers include city, county, state and federal fire service organizations as well as those maintained by the military and private industry, including insurance companies and investigation agencies.

Up-to-Date Information

For students interested in a notification program to keep up-to-date with volunteer and career employment opportunities, training and education courses, and various newsworthy items related to fire and EMS issues occurring nationwide, they can sign up for the Chabot College Fire Technology & EMS e-mail mailing list. This free mailing list is available to anyone, whether enrolled in Chabot College courses or not. Mailing list recipient names and email addresses are kept confidential. If interested in joining the email list, contact Steve at sprziborowski@chabotcollege.edu.
available for student firefighters through the Chabot College Work Experience program. After completing the Academy, a student can enroll in Fire Technology 95 and 96 (Work Experience and Work Experience Seminar) and participate as a Work Experience Student Firefighter in various local fire departments, gaining valuable experience and time that may be considered to be volunteer in order to complete the State Firefighter 1 Certification process. Chabot College does not sign-off students for their State Firefighter 1 Certification. Only the Fire Chief of a California Fire Department can sign the State Firefighter 1 Certification Application for a student.

1. Apply for admission at the college.
2. Decide whether you want to pursue a Certificate of Achievement or an Associates Degree.
3. Begin taking the courses in the recommended order.
4. Talk with a Counselor and/or the Fire Technology Coordinator to discuss your options and if you have any questions. Counseling appointments can be made by calling the Counseling Department at 510-723-6718.

For further information, please visit the Fire Technology website at www.chabotfire.com. You can also contact Bob Buell, Fire Technology Coordinator at Chabot College, in room 1556, at 510-723-6851 or via e-mail at bbuell@chabotcollege.edu.