

FIREFIGHTER LAYOFFS CAN COMPROMISE PUBLIC SAFETY



On the issue of Rocky View County in Alberta deciding to layoff firefighters, union leaders say cutting the jobs of firefighters would drastically reduce public safety. The union said that firefighters in Rocky View had been caught completely off guard by the announcement made by county officials on Wednesday reducing the number of full-time firefighters in the entire county to 26. Rocky View County manager Rob Coon admitted that after trimming, the fire department will have to focus on basic exterior fire prevention, or that firefighters would be available only for rescuing people from burning buildings, and would not be available for suppressing interior fires and property damage. Lorne West, 6th District vice-president for the International Association of Fire Fighters said “They’re essentially moving from fire protection and fire service to simply a defensive operation.” West further added that the county’s reduced firefighting staff will not be able to meet international response standards that call for four firefighters present on scene of incident within four minutes of first information. “If we’re not able to assemble crews of a minimum of four people at a scene within that window, we’re not going to be able to do a rescue” said West. However, county officials said that if they believed reducing the number of firefighters would reduce public safety, then they would never have done so. “We’ve spent a lot of time and effort, both administratively and in our council chambers, talking about fire services and fire suppression ... We’re actually building fire halls as we speak, to improve our fire services throughout the county. That being said, how we deliver those services is being evaluated,” said Coon. According to County officials, layoffs are going to affect across the board including engineering, planning, and human resources departments in addition to the fire department. Coon admitted that it was a difficult time for the country, but like many other communities, Rocky View county too, has been affected by the economic recession. This year, another 12 Rocky View firefighters had lost their jobs but since then have been rehired by the Town of Chestermere, which has built its own fire protection team.

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