

Adopt a Fire Hydrant Program

By B. Michael Thurlow, Fire Chief

Now that we are in the heart of the winter season I wanted to remind everyone of the Scarborough Fire Department's Adopt a Hydrant program. In Scarborough we have a variety of different types of fire hydrants. Our community is so large we are actually covered by two separate water districts. The Portland Water District provides Sebago Lake water to most of the community south of the Maine Turnpike with the exception of Pine Point and Blue Point. Those neighborhoods are served from the Maine Water Company system with water that is pumped from the Saco River.

In addition to those municipal hydrants we have a system of private hydrants, dry hydrants, and holding tanks. Let me explain the difference between all of them. A municipal hydrant is a pressurized hydrant off one of the mains owned by one of the two previously mentioned water companies. The town pays a hydrant rental fee for each one that primarily covers a prorated cost of providing the water mains and capacity to assure an adequate water flow for firefighting activities throughout the community along with a small annual maintenance allocation. A private hydrant is generally located on private property and is installed by the business owner or development where required by codes and ordinances. These are the same type of hydrants from the same water companies, but the town doesn't pay the rental fee and the owner of the hydrant is responsible for the installation and maintenance because it is on private property instead of the public way.

North of the Maine Turnpike where we don't have any municipal water service, the town and local developers have installed a combination of dry hydrants and holding tanks. A Dry hydrant is a connection that ends in a pond, stream, river, or some other natural body of water. To access that water the fire department uses our pumper trucks to draft water from these static sources. Finally we have a number of holding tanks which are nothing more than large underground cisterns that are designed to hold approximately 15,000 gallons of water to provide coverage in areas where there aren't sufficient natural water sources to provide adequate water supply for firefighting activities.

So you might wonder, in a large community like Scarborough at 54 square miles, how many hydrants do we have to maintain? The answer might surprise you. We have 701 public hydrants, 108 private hydrants, 63 holding tanks, and 19 dry hydrants for a total of 891.

Now that you know how many we have, you can better understand the effort involved in trying to keep all of them clear of snow and ice during the winter months. That's the idea behind the Adopt a Hydrant program. Most people don't think twice about the hydrant near their home, but all of us in the fire service are keenly aware of their importance when we need to fight a fire. We don't have the time to try and find them if they are buried in the snow, or try to shovel them after they are encased in ice while responding to a serious fire. That's why we are proactive with clearing all of them after every storm by sending the fire crews out to hand shovel them to make sure they are available and ready for use if we need them.

The Adopt a Hydrant program encourages citizens to help with this monumental task by adopting the hydrant that is closest to your home and shoveling it for us. It is a great

public service and wonderful civic lesson to teach your younger children. Please also consider clearing the snow from a fire hydrant for your neighbors who may have medical conditions, disabilities, or those who are elderly that may be unable to do so themselves. This act of kindness will benefit the entire neighborhood.

Each hydrant that a citizen clears speeds up the work for our firefighters and helps keep our apparatus off the roads. When shoveling please understand that on some hydrants we may need to connect up to three different hoses. Please make sure to shovel an area the full length of your shovel's handle completely around the hydrant all the way to the ground, as well as a path to the street to provide sufficient access and room to connect the hoses.

Thank you very much in advance for your help with this important process after each storm. There is no need to notify the department about a hydrant you have adopted as this is an informal volunteer program. Your help is very much appreciated, and as they say the life you help save, may be your own!

If you have any questions about this program feel free to contact me at mthurlow@scarboroughmaine.org or call 730-4201.