

DELTA COLLEGE  
COUNSELING/ADVISING & CAREER SERVICES  
**FIREFIGHTER**

Salary Range: \$20,290 to \$66,140 annually

Personal Skills: Leadership/management and mechanical/manipulative

Work Environment: Indoors and outdoors/multiple locations

**Description**

Firefighters are responsible for protecting people's lives and property from the hazards of fire and other emergencies. They provide this protection by fighting fires to prevent property damage and by rescuing people trapped or injured by fires or other accidents. Through inspection and safety education, firefighters also work to prevent fires and unsafe conditions that could result in dangerous, life-threatening situations. They assist in many types of emergencies and disasters in everyday life. In many rural areas firefighters serve on a volunteer basis. Firefighters may respond to fire alarms and other emergency calls. They also perform demonstrations and drills and help other communities. They continue their education and take courses in methods, pump operations and maintenance, and hydraulics. Another responsibility of a firefighter is educating the public about fire prevention and safety measures. They will also assist police with arson cases, accidents, and disasters.

**Working Conditions**

Firefighters work indoors/outdoors at multiple different locations. Their duties range anywhere from housekeeping to fighting a massive fire. Their working conditions can change in a matter of minutes with one single alarm. The job of firefighters has become more complicated in recent years due to the use of increasingly sophisticated equipment. Firefighters also work with emergency medical services providing emergency medical treatment, assisting

in the rescue and recovery from natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes, and floods as well as man-made disasters, such as hazardous chemical incidents or rescuing victims of bombings. Firefighters operate as a team and independently at incidents of uncertain duration, exposed to the elements and under extreme fluctuations in temperature while performing their duties. The work of firefighters is very dangerous. The nature of the work demands training, practice, courage, and teamwork. Firefighters must function in environments of high noise, poor visibility, limited mobility, at heights, and in enclosed or confined spaces. However, firefighting is more than a physical activity that requires strength and alertness. It is also a science that demands continual study and learning. You should be able to work well under pressure or in critical or unexpected situations, work well when taking necessary risks, use reason and logic, and be able to perform mathematical operations quickly and accurately.

**Training, Other Qualifications**

Most job opportunities open to firefighters today require applicants to have at least a high school education. Today's firefighter needs to have a good understanding of the sciences, as much of what firefighters do revolves around emergency medical services and the extinguishing of fire. The Associate in Applied Science Degree in Fire Science Technology offered by Delta College prepares students in firefighting, fire investigation and prevention, emergency

prehospital care, industrial security and safety, and leadership and training. The program is designed to provide educational credentials for employment or promotional opportunities. As a rule, entry level workers in large fire departments are also trained for several weeks at the department training center or academy.

**Job Outlook**

About 300,000 professional firefighters are currently employed in the United States, mostly by municipal fire departments. Fire fighting is forecasted to remain a very competitive field, and the number of people interested in becoming firefighters will outweigh the number of available positions in most areas. Employment of firefighters is expected to grow faster than the average through 2014. There is also a growing number of “call” firefighters, who are paid only when responding to fires. Little growth is expected in large, urban fire departments. Some local governments are expected to contract for firefighting services with private companies. In some fire departments, work shifts have been shortened, and two people may be employed to cover a shift normally worked by one person. Employment opportunities in this area should be available as new full-time fire departments replace volunteer organizations in small communities and as existing fire departments expand in growing suburban areas. Most openings are expected to result from the need to replace those who retire, die or transfer to other occupations. Fire prevention officers in industry and business, and fire safety education specialists are in demand.

**Earnings**

Earnings for Firefighters are established by local communities and vary greatly. Wages are highest in large cities. Nationally, in May 2006 the annual average salary of all firefighters was \$42,370. The Michigan average was \$39,580.

Firefighters' annual salaries (May 2006) in selected Michigan cities were:

| <b>City</b>  | <b>Annual Average</b> |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| Ann arbor    | \$44,800              |
| Detroit      | \$49,090              |
| Flint        | \$36,070              |
| Grand Rapids | \$38,110              |
| Kalamazoo    | \$31,300              |
| Lansing      | \$40,940              |
| Muskegon     | \$32,030              |
| Saginaw      | \$36,760              |

Firefighters working evenings or nights may receive a shift premium. Volunteers may be paid hourly, monthly, or on a per fire basis.

**Related Occupations**

Fire Inspectors, Military Service, Public Safety Inspectors, Emergency Medical Technicians, Fire Investigators, and Fire Safety Technicians.

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Sources: Encyclopedia of Careers & Vocational Guidance and the Michigan Occupational Information System

Career Center, D132  
Bay City/Saginaw: (989) 686-9072  
Midland/Auburn: (989) 495-4000, Ext. 9072  
Frankenmuth, Birch Run, Reese & Vassar: (989) 758-3400, Ext. 9072  
<http://www.delta.edu/careercenter>

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