



## TOWN OF AMHERST Central Fire Alarm Office

500 John James Audubon Parkway  
Amherst, New York 14228-1131  
Office 716-689-1230 Fax 716-689-1229

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The Town of Amherst Central Fire Alarm Office dispatched 23,797 emergency calls in 2024. This total represents an increase of 1,422 calls from 2023, a nearly 2% increase. Attached is the official breakdown by department or agency.

Of note, there were 125 recorded structure fires in 2024, an increase of 15 from 2023. Total fires were 338, up from 297 in 2023. Medical services calls increased by 925 and totaled 14,295. There were 4,128 miscellaneous public assistance type calls as compared to 3,943 in 2023. Miscellaneous calls are used to categorize a wide variety of public assistance calls such as power lines down, carbon monoxide leaks or gasoline or chemical spills.

Fire damage in 2024 totaled \$6,439,350.00 a slight decrease from 2023. Unfortunately, there were three civilian fire fatalities in 2024.

Many initiatives were undertaken within the office in 2024, all directed at maintaining and enhancing the level of service provided by the Central Alarm Office.

All the Alarm Office employees continue to maintain their certification as Emergency Medical and Emergency Fire Dispatchers. This national certification allows them to provide immediate and potentially life-saving directions to callers, well before emergency units arrive on scene. In addition, dispatchers are trained how to calm frightened, distraught and excited callers in order for them to be able to follow the directions being provided. The training has contributed to many success stories during the year with dispatchers providing directions for bleeding control, broken bone management, assisting choking victims, delivering babies, performing CPR and numerous other emergency medical type calls. Directions are also be provided for fire and service incidents as well all designed to limit fire damage and keep citizens safe.

To maintain the certifications, dispatchers must participate in continuing educational training and re-certify every two years through the International Academics of Emergency Dispatch. They are all also required to maintain CPR certification and many participate in local fire department training drills as well. As part of the continuing education, they are also required to attend some of the regular Amherst, Clarence and Newstead Fire Chief's Association meetings in order to stay up to date with current events and topics within the national and local fire service. In addition, regular contact is maintained with various emergency service providers, not only within the three towns and two villages served by the Central Fire Alarm Office, but with County and State officials as well. All of these efforts are undertaken to ensure that every possible effort is directed at maintaining open lines of communication and strong working relationships between all the various emergency service providers while providing the responders, and community residents alike, with quality, professional and progressive fire and rescue service communications and support.



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The Alarm Office continues to utilize and maintain an in-house digital fire alarm monitoring system. This system receives fire alarm signals from numerous municipal buildings, fire stations and schools throughout our dispatch area. The fire alarm signal is sent directly into the Central Fire Alarm Office allowing the dispatchers to immediately alert the appropriate Fire Department. As part of their duties, Fire Dispatchers maintain this system and have been instrumental in designing, implementing and maintaining the alarm system minimizing the need for costly outside contractors. In addition, the Fire Dispatchers work closely with these organizations as they conduct school drills and alarm system tests, ensuring the signals are received properly and that the system is working at peak efficiency.

To maximize efficiency and have advanced life support (paramedic level) service respond immediately to calls for help, the Alarm Office's computer system is linked together with Twin City Ambulance. Twin City is the agency contracted to provide ambulance service to the areas serviced by the Alarm Office. The "Data-Link" as it is referred to, allows for the immediate exchange of information between the Alarm Office computer and Twin City's computer. Twin City personnel receive the address and type of emergency as soon as a call is dispatched and they can immediately dispatch their ambulance and provide important information to Fire Alarm Office dispatchers without having to tie up time on a phone or radio. In addition, Amherst Fire dispatchers can monitor ambulance locations, arrival times, transport times and many other variables which all add great efficiency to the overall operation.

Working in close coordination with the Town of Amherst Department of Emergency Services, many hours were spent planning for the solar eclipse and extra dispatchers were on duty to ensure adequate coverage was in place to handle an expected call volume increase due to a surge in visitors in the area.

In 2024, all the dispatchers were trained by the Town of Amherst Department of Emergency Services to use Erie County *DisasterLAN* software. DLAN is used by counties, cities, and other entities throughout New York State, and helps quickly deploy equipment and resources where needed during critical emergency incidents and weather events.

During the summer the office was inspected by the National Weather Service as part of a program designed to designate the Town of Amherst as a *weather ready nation*. Along with other town departments, the Alarm Office is required to maintain early alerting equipment for storm emergencies as well as meet other important criteria in order to maintain the certification. The program is sponsored by the Emergency Services Department and helps communities to be better prepared before, during and after weather events as well as provides community leaders and emergency managers tools and resources to help strengthen their local weather safety programs.



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The Central Fire Alarm Office had several personnel changes over the past year as well. Senior Fire Dispatcher Jim Koeppel retired after 22 years of service, the last 1/1/2 as Supervising Fire Dispatcher. Tom Merrill was promoted to assume Jim's position, and longtime dispatcher Richard Meldrum retired at the end of the year completing 30 years of dedicated service. Both Jim and Rick were exemplary employees who were consummate professionals and extremely dedicated to the dispatching craft. They will be missed.

In addition, three new dispatchers were hired to replace three others who left in 2023. The office welcomed Stephen Stoeckl, Logan Girdlestone and Matthew Avery into the ranks. Fire Dispatcher Douglas Sandburg was welcomed back from military deployment. He is a member of the New York Army National Guard and was sent to Poland for a 12-month tour of duty.

The Town of Amherst Central Fire Alarm Office dispatches fire, rescue and emergency medical units for 16 volunteer fire departments covering over 158 square miles in the Towns of Amherst, Clarence, Newstead and Villages of Akron and Williamsville. 2023 census figures show 172,824 people residing in the dispatch area. Thousands of others work or pass through the dispatch areas every day. Ranging from suburban to rural, the office provides service to a mix of residential, commercial, educational, agricultural, and industrial properties that all present unique challenges to responders and dispatchers alike. With the increase in call volume and other responsibilities handled by the office, the dispatchers are proud of the fact that over 97% of incoming emergency phone calls are answered by a trained and competent Amherst Fire Dispatcher in under 10 seconds. Over 99% of the calls are answered in less than 15 seconds. This is a tribute to the dedication, commitment and professionalism of all dispatchers who are on duty 24/7/365.

Many initiatives are planned for 2025 and beyond. But, as the call volume and public's reliance on the volunteer fire and Emergency Medical Services increases as it has every year since the first call was dispatched in 1962, residents and firefighters alike in the communities of Amherst, Clarence and Newstead will continue to receive the same level of proficient and competent service that has always been the hallmark of the Central Fire Alarm Office.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Merrill  
Senior Fire Dispatcher