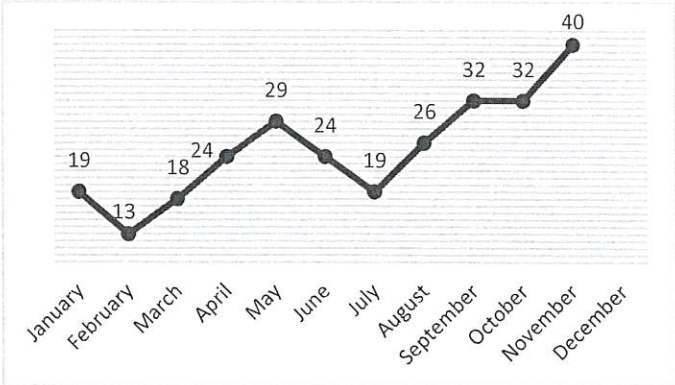




To: Honorable Mayor and Houston City Council  
From: Christian Hartley, Fire Chief *CH*  
Thru: Mayor Virgie Thompson *VT*  
Subj: Fire Chief's Report – December 2021

<b>CALLS TO DATE – 2021</b>	<b>276</b>
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November, 2021, was extremely busy in every aspect of our jobs. It was also heartbreaking in that it saw the first fatal fire in at least two decades in the city of Houston, and also bore witness to a family saved by alarms installed by the FD

There was a structure fire on Winterhaven Drive that took the life on one long-time resident. Investigation revealed that the fire started in an electrical outlet in a back room, but that the occupant was not aware of the fire until it was large enough that it broke out a back window. The occupant went outside to have someone dial 9-1-1, and then for undetermined reasons went back inside. Crews were able to remove her from the home and attempted life-saving procedures that, unfortunately, were unsuccessful. This fire was preceded by one week by a fire in Meadow Lakes that Houston was on that was also a fatal fire. That fire's cause remains under investigation, but at this time is also believed to be unintentional. These types of calls hit responders hard, but importantly it hurts the families, friends, and coworkers of those who are lost. It is so important for your friends, for your family, and for everybody in your life's circle that you have working smoke alarms in your home so that you can be safe and get out in the event of a fire or other emergency, and stay out.

We had an incident in Houston in the Dilley Estates subdivision that was testament to this. A family had finished baking cookies and prepared to settle down for the night by turning off the oven and closing the damper to the fireplace when carbon monoxide alarms sounded. Firefighters found that the vent fan over the over was creating a negative pressure in the home which was pulling air down through the chimney and, because of a weakened gasket around the fireplace's door, this was drafting carbon monoxide from the firebox into the home. With the vent fan on, our multigas meters detected a rise in carbon monoxide from 0 to over 300 in less than 20 seconds. Had the family gone to sleep and not had the alarms in place, it is very likely that the outcome would have been disastrous for the other family member when they returned from work the following morning. An entire family was literally saved by a \$21 alarm that was funded by a donation from Three Bears Alaska and installed by Houston FD.



*Firefighter installing alarms that later saved a family*

Additional calls of note include a vehicle that left the road and struck a culvert on Hawk Lane, knocking its driver unconscious and disabling the vehicle in subzero weather. A car discovered them a few hours later because they noticed tire tracks leaving Hawk Lane. Their decision to take a look saved that man, no doubt about it. A similar result happened just the next day on Armstrong Road when a woman noticed her husband hadn't returned from cutting firewood after a few hours so she went looking for him and found him unconscious in their driveway. Because he was laying directly on the ground, his cold injuries were much worse – he lost several toes to frostbite. There was a very high number of fires this month, nearly all caused by items being ignited by heating appliances. The cold also caused a number of other hypothermia medical calls.



*Rescuers on scene of a vehicle off the road on Hawk Lane*

As far as animal control, there were many concerns last month that continued through this month. Our shelter was overwhelmed with 6 dogs in our 5 kennels, 2 dogs being boarded at Mat-Su Borough Animal Care at a cost to us, 4 dogs on hold waiting for an owner surrender, and then there were two emergencies involving animals. As of the time of this report, three of the dogs have been transferred to foster homes, one additional will be returned to its owner on payment of fees, and two will be made available for adoption immediately. The four additional dogs were rehomed through other means with our assistance, and only one dog that was at the shelter will need to be euthanized due to behavioral conditions that make it unsafe to be fostered or adopted. The two dogs at the Borough shelter will be transferred back to the City's care to decrease boarding costs now that we have space. We are still pursuing partnership options between the Borough and the City that would aid in times like this.

This winter has not been easy for anybody, or any animal; and it is only beginning. Remember to check your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, change their batteries if you didn't last month, and tag your pets so that they don't end up in the shelter. Also, remember that pet registration is required for all cats and dogs in the city just like it is in the Borough, so contact me or city hall if you need information on how to register any animal you may have that is not yet registered locally.

We also received a grant under \$1,000 from Alaska State Firefighter's Association for training supplies, and the large \$109,800 grant from Mat-Su Health Foundation that has been forwarded to you for approval and appropriation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Handwritten signature of Christian M. Hartley

Christian M. Hartley