

# Table of Contents

## INTRODUCTION

Who is this handbook for?.....	3
What is a pension? .....	3
Who belongs to this Plan? .....	4
How do I enroll in this Plan?.....	4

## TIMING YOUR RETIREMENT

How much money do I need to retire? .....	5
When am I eligible to retire? .....	5
Does WRS resources to help me with planning for my retirement?.....	6

## YOUR PENSION ACCOUNT

Who funds my pension benefits? .....	6
How does WRS keep track of my contributions?.....	7
Does my account receive interest? .....	7
Can I contribute additional money to my pension account? .....	7
What if I didn't start paying into the Plan right away? .....	7
Can I take a loan from my account? .....	8
Will I receive account statements? .....	8
Are my records confidential?.....	8

## AMOUNT OF YOUR BENEFIT

How much will my pension benefit be at full retirement? .....	9
What if I take early retirement? .....	9

## TERMINATION BEFORE RETIREMENT AGE

If I stop working as a volunteer firefighter before retirement age, what are my choices? .....	9
--	---

**BENEFICIARIES**

---

What happens to my pension  
should I die? .....11

**AFTER RETIREMENT**

---

How do I start my benefit?.....11

Can I still be a volunteer firefighter after  
I start receiving my benefit?.....12

How do I get paid each month?.....12

Is my pension income taxable?.....12

Will I receive benefit increases  
after I retire?.....13

**OTHER TOPICS OF INTEREST**

---

What if I get divorced? .....13

Will my pension benefit affect my Social  
Security benefit? .....14

How will military deployment affect my  
retirement account? .....14

Who oversees the Volunteer Firefighter's  
Pension Plan? .....14

What if I disagree with the Wyoming  
Retirement System? .....15

How can I learn more about the  
finances of WRS? .....15

**TABLE OF BENEFITS**..... Back Cover



# INTRODUCTION

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## Who is this handbook for?

This handbook is for members of the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan and is designed to give you the knowledge you need to plan for your retirement. The Wyoming Statutes (W.S. 35-9-601 through 35-9-615) establish a system for the administration of a retirement program for volunteer firefighters in Wyoming, including: creating a Board to provide for the investment and control of program funds; designating administrative responsibility and program controls; specifying the level of program benefits, eligibility therefore and the sources of funding; and providing a means for appealing administrative decisions. WRS also administers other pension plans for different groups of employees, a 457 Deferred Compensation Plan and sponsors a supplemental life insurance plan through Prudential for public employees in Wyoming.

The WRS Board is responsible for investing all of the contributions to ensure there will be enough money to pay for the future pension benefit you are earning.

## What is a pension?

Once you reach retirement age, your benefit under the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan will be in the form of a monthly benefit for life. The technical name for this type of retirement plan is a pension or "defined benefit" plan because the monthly payment you will receive for your lifetime is defined or specified. Pension plans are no longer commonly provided by private sector



employers, so this plan may be a way for you to supplement retirement benefits you may have through your full-time employer.

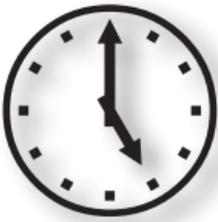
## **Who belongs to the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan?**

**A** volunteer firefighter is defined as an individual who is carried on the rolls of, but devotes less than his entire time of employment to activities of a volunteer fire department, of which all or a portion of the members are volunteer; and during the course of any one (1) year, attends not less than fifty percent (50%), or not less than six (6), of the volunteer fire department's monthly meetings in any one (1) year. If you transfer from one volunteer fire department to another in Wyoming, you are able to keep building your pension without interruption, so long as payments are kept current.

If you assist a fire department but are not regularly enrolled as a firefighter, you are not eligible to participate in the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan. You may not participate in the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan and as a member of the Paid Firefighter's Pension Plan if participation is based upon service for the same fire department.

## **How do I enroll in the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan?**

**I**f you meet the definition of a volunteer firefighter eligible for this plan, the fire department you volunteer with will register you as a member. Be sure your fire department provides you with the registration form.



## TIMING YOUR RETIREMENT

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### How much money do I need for retirement?

Generally, financial experts estimate most people will need 70% to 90% of their pre-retirement income to maintain the lifestyle they had before they stopped working. However, because each individual has unique needs, you should consider your own personal retirement goals. The American Savings Education Council points out you may want to plan to replace 100% or more of your pre-retirement income if you have not reached your prime earning years, want an enhanced retirement lifestyle, or expect high medical expenses in retirement.

In addition to Social Security, personal savings, and any other employer-sponsored retirement accounts you may have, the Volunteer Firefighter Pension benefit is just another way for you to replace a portion of your pre-retirement income.

### When am I eligible to retire?

You may retire at age 60 if you started as a member of the Plan before you were age 46 and between ages 61 and 70 if you started after age 46. Please refer to the Table of Benefits on page X for your specific retirement age. The age when you started in the plan is known as “entry age”.



## Does WRS have resources to help me with planning for my retirement?

**Y**ou can visit our web site, attend our educational seminars, or contact our Retirement Educators. The WRS web site at <http://retirement.state.wy.us> has many useful links and benefit calculators. WRS Retirement Educators present informational seminars and provide one-on-one counseling about retirement issues.

## YOUR PENSION ACCOUNT

### Who funds my pension benefits?

**Y**our pension benefit is funded primarily by a tax on fire insurance premiums and secondarily by member contributions. The Wyoming State Treasurer deposits half of the taxes received from fire insurance premiums into the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan for the benefit of its members. As a member, you must contribute \$12.50 a month. A city, town, county, or district maintaining a volunteer fire department may, upon a resolution passed by its governing body, pay all, or a portion of the firefighter's contributions for the Plan.

WRS must receive your monthly contributions in a timely manner. Monthly contributions must be received by WRS not later than three (3) months following the close of the calendar month for which they are applicable. With the consent of the Board and on such



terms and conditions as they may deem just, payments may be accepted at an earlier or later date. You may transfer from one fire department to another in Wyoming, so long as payments are kept current.

## **How does WRS keep track of my contributions?**

A separate account is maintained for each member of WRS showing your share of contributions and accrued interest. These separate accounts are primarily used to know how much to refund to you if you decide to take your money out of the system and forego a monthly benefit at retirement age.

## **Does my account receive interest?**

Yes, interest is calculated on all accounts at the rate determined by the Board and is added to your account annually, creating an annual compounding effect. This rate is currently 3.0%.

## **Can I contribute additional money to my pension account?**

No, additional funds may not be sent in excess of the required monthly contribution. Remember, your benefit is not based on your contributions; it is based on the table of benefits found on page X.

## **What if I didn't start paying into the Plan right away?**

If you are an active member of the Plan and have previous service as a volunteer firefighter in Wyoming while you were not enrolled in the Plan, you may “buy back”



that service. You must purchase service in multiples of one year and cannot purchase more than your actual service as a volunteer firefighter in Wyoming. Contact WRS at (307)777-7691 to request a calculation for how much your service would cost. The purchase must be made in a lump sum. You are allowed to transfer funds from other retirement savings vehicles, such as deferred compensation plans, to make this purchase.

## Can I take a loan from my account?

**N**o, you cannot borrow against your account. Nor can your account be attached or garnisheed.

## Will I receive account statements?



**Y**es, each year WRS will send you an annual Member Account Statement. You usually receive your statement

in March. The account statement gives your current account balance, and lists your spouse's name and the number of children. Because we have a high number of inquiries after statements are received, we ask you to contact WRS in writing with questions or to report information on the statement that appears to be incorrect.

## Are my records confidential?

**Y**es, the account records of any member cannot be released unless the member authorizes, in writing, the release of such records, or a court order directs the records be available for inspection or release.



## **AMOUNT OF YOUR BENEFIT**

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### **How much will my pension benefit be at full retirement?**

**W**hen you reach retirement age, you will receive a lifetime, monthly benefit equal to the pension benefit corresponding to your entry age as specified in the Table of Benefits. The Table also lists the benefit for surviving spouses and children, which would be based on your entry age. The amounts in the table are applicable to any member participating on a \$12.50 per month contribution basis. Benefits will be adjusted for those who participated under the old \$5 plan.

WRS has a benefit calculator available on the Web site at <http://retirement.state.wy.us>. Be sure to select the calculator for the Volunteer Firefighter's Plan.

### **What if I take early retirement?**

There is no provision for early retirement in the Volunteer Firefighter Plan.

## **TERMINATION BEFORE RETIREMENT AGE**

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### **If I stop working as a volunteer firefighter before retirement age, what are my choices?**

**I**f you terminate membership as a volunteer firefighter, you may:

- Continue making contributions to the plan if you became a member



before February 5, 1993, and have at least five (5) years of service as a volunteer firefighter in Wyoming before terminating, or

- Continue making contributions to the plan if you became a member on, or after February 5, 1993, and have at least ten (10) years of contributions in the plan before terminating.
- Leave your contributions on deposit if you intend to rejoin a participating fire department.

If you do not meet the above criteria, you must take a refund of your account or roll it over to another qualified retirement plan, such as a 401(a), 401(k), 403(b), 457 deferred compensation plan, or a traditional IRA. You must have a balance of at least two hundred dollars (\$200.00) for a rollover.

Once you terminate membership as a volunteer firefighter, you may also withdraw from the plan and receive a refund of contributions equal to the amount you contributed, or was contributed on your behalf, together with interest, at the rate of three percent (3%), compounded annually. The volunteer fire department you worked for must complete and submit a termination form. By taking a refund you forfeit your right to a monthly benefit. There is no way to restore service once you have taken a refund.





## **BENEFICIARIES**

### **What happens to my pension should I die?**



If you die, your surviving spouse would receive a monthly payment set forth in the Table of Benefits on page X. Upon your spouse's death, an amount equal to five thousand dollars (\$5,000), less the amount of benefits received after your death, or the amount remaining in your account would be paid to the estate of your spouse unless your spouse is survived by a child eligible for a child's benefit.

When both you and your spouse die, the lawful guardian or guardians of your surviving child or children who have not attained the age of twenty-one (21) would receive an amount equal to the child benefit established in the Table of Benefits. An amount of five thousand dollars (\$5,000), less the total amount paid in spouse's and children's benefits, shall be paid in equal shares to each child alive on the date on which the youngest reaches age twenty-one (21).

If you die with no survivor eligible for a monthly benefit, a lump-sum payment of five thousand dollars (\$5,000) or the amount in your account, whichever is greater, shall be paid to your estate.

## **AFTER RETIREMENT**

### **How do I start my benefit?**

You must submit an application for retirement using the form provided by WRS



before any retirement benefit can be paid. WRS will send you an application and an estimate of your benefit approximately four to six months prior to when you will be eligible for benefits. You may file your retirement application at anytime, but we recommend it be submitted at least sixty (60) days before you want to receive your first retirement check. Your benefit cannot be started until WRS receives all contributions pertaining to your account and contributions must be paid through the month you reach retirement age.

## **Can I continue working as a volunteer firefighter after I start receiving my benefit?**

**A**lthough you have reached retirement age, we do not require you to discontinue your service as a volunteer firefighter. However, we will no longer accept contributions on your account.

## **How do I get paid each month?**

**A**ll benefit payments are directly deposited to your financial institution on the last business day of each month. Each payment represents your retirement benefit for the preceding month. Direct deposit is mandatory for all benefit payments.

## **Is my pension income taxable?**

**I  
R  
S**

**Y**es, your monthly benefit is reported to the IRS as income and you are responsible for paying any taxes. You will receive a Form 1099-R annually for tax reporting purposes. A W4-P form is included in your retirement application,



which you will submit to WRS to indicate how much federal income tax you want withheld from your benefit payment.

Please consult a tax accountant or the IRS for further information. WRS staff cannot furnish tax advice.

## **Will I receive benefit increases after I retire?**

**T**he Board may grant an annual cost of living adjustment (COLA) that would increase your benefit after retirement. The maximum COLA the Board could grant is three percent (3%), and the Board may award a COLA below three percent (3%) depending on the funding status of the Plan.

Once you have been receiving benefits for at least two years as of each July 1, you are eligible for cost of living adjustments granted by the Board. The adjustment is made each year on the first of July.

## **OTHER TOPICS OF INTEREST**

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### **What if I get divorced?**

**W**RS has formal rules regarding divorce settlements. If you divorce prior to starting your benefit, WRS requires a Qualified Domestic Relations Order (QDRO) signed by a judge to split your retirement benefit between you and your former spouse. Please be aware, if your former spouse is awarded a percentage of your account, your monthly retirement benefit will be reduced for your lifetime, even if your former spouse elects to be paid in a lump sum payment.



## Will my pension benefit affect my Social Security benefit?

**N**o, Social Security coverage available to you is completely independent of coverage under WRS. You may receive benefits concurrently from both WRS and Social Security. Retirement benefits are not subject to Social Security taxes.

## How will military deployment affect my retirement account?



**I**n the event you are called for active duty in the armed forces of the United States or in the Wyoming National Guard, you would be permitted to continue making payments to the Volunteer Firefighter Plan, regardless of the number of years of service you have.

## Who oversees the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan?

**T**he Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Board has the power to: make rules and regulations governing the operation of the Plan; provide for the investment and control of program funds; investigate any claim applications; conduct hearings; receive evidence; and act in a quasi-judicial capacity. Under a memorandum of understanding, the board responsible for the other pension plans administered by WRS makes the investment decisions for the assets of the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan. The Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan is administered by the Director of the Wyoming Retirement System (WRS), who is also the Ex-Officio Chairman of the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Board.



The Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Board holds a regular annual meeting immediately preceding commencement of the annual convention of the Wyoming State Firefighter's Association. Special meetings of the Board may be called by the Chairman of the Board. Board meetings are public meetings at all times, except when the Board is in executive session. No action of the Board shall be taken except during the public meetings.

## **What if I disagree with the Wyoming Retirement System?**

**Y**ou are entitled to a hearing with the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Board regarding any dispute and the Wyoming Administrative Procedures Act will be followed. Chapter 4 of the Board's administrative rules (available from the Secretary of State's office) gives more information about the process.

You may appeal a decision of the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Board with the district court in your county of residence. The district court may rule on the Board's decision and may reverse or affirm the decision.

## **How can I learn more about the finances of WRS?**

**W**RS undergoes an audit for each calendar year and resulting reports are available on our Web site.



*This publication serves as a summary plan document for the Volunteer Firefighter's Pension Plan and is meant to provide information about the main features of the plan.*

*State statutes and administrative rules will govern in the event of any discrepancies with information in this book.*

*None of the information in this publication should be construed as advice. You should consult an appropriate professional for specific tax, financial, legal, or investment advice.*

# Table of Benefits

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Entry Age	Retire Age	Member Pension	Spouse Pension	Child Benefit
15	60	691.44	460.96	230.48
16	60	673.46	448.97	224.49
17	60	655.48	436.99	218.49
18	60	637.50	425.00	212.50
19	60	619.52	413.01	206.51
20	60	601.54	401.02	200.51
21	60	583.56	389.04	194.52
22	60	565.58	377.05	188.53
23	60	547.59	365.06	182.53
24	60	529.61	353.08	176.54
25	60	510.82	340.54	170.27
26	60	493.65	329.10	164.55
27	60	475.67	317.11	158.56
28	60	457.69	305.13	152.56
29	60	439.71	293.14	146.57
30	60	421.73	281.15	140.58
31	60	403.75	269.17	134.58
32	60	385.77	257.18	128.59
33	60	367.79	245.19	122.60
34	60	349.81	233.20	116.60
35	60	331.83	221.22	110.61
36	60	318.75	212.50	106.25
37	60	305.67	203.78	101.89
38	60	292.60	195.06	97.53
39	60	279.52	186.35	93.17
40	60	266.44	177.63	88.81
41	60	253.36	168.91	84.45
42	60	240.29	160.19	80.10
43	60	227.21	151.47	75.74
44	60	214.13	142.76	71.38
45	60	201.06	134.04	67.02
46	61	201.06	134.04	67.02
47	61	192.88	128.59	64.29
48	62	192.88	128.59	64.29
49	62	184.71	123.14	61.57
50	63	184.71	123.14	61.57
51	63	176.54	117.69	58.85
52	64	176.54	117.69	58.85
53	64	168.36	112.24	56.12
54	65	168.36	112.24	56.12
55	65	160.19	106.79	53.40
56	66	160.19	106.79	53.40
57	66	152.02	101.35	50.67
58	67	152.02	101.35	50.67
59	67	143.85	95.90	47.95
60	68	143.85	95.90	47.95
61	68	135.67	90.45	45.22
62	69	135.67	90.45	45.22
63	69	127.50	85.00	42.50
64	70	127.50	85.00	42.50
65	70	119.33	79.55	39.78