

Ride-Along Program

331.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Ride-Along Program provides an opportunity for citizens to experience fire service functions first hand. This policy provides the requirements, approval process and hours of operation for the Ride-Along Program.

331.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the San Marcos Fire Department to provide an opportunity for citizens to experience fire service functions when specific criteria are met.

331.3 PROCEDURE TO REQUEST A RIDE-ALONG

Generally, ride-along requests will be reviewed and scheduled by the Operations Assistant Chief or the authorized designee.

The Operations Assistant Chief or the authorized designee will schedule a date, based on availability, generally at least two weeks after the date of application. If approved, a copy will be forwarded to the respective Battalion Chief as soon as possible for his/her scheduling considerations.

If the ride-along is denied, a representative of the Department will contact the applicant and advise him/her of the denial.

Once approved, civilian ride-alongs will be allowed to ride no more than once every six months. An exception may be made for the following: students, Explorers, chaplains, reserves, applicants, and others with approval of the Operations Assistant Chief.

An effort will be made to ensure that no more than one citizen will participate in a ride-along during any given time period. Normally, no more than one ride-along will be allowed in the fire apparatus at a given time.

[See attachment: Ride Out Liability Release.pdf](#)

331.3.1 PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Prior to participating in a ride-along, every participant who may come into contact with private health-related information will be required to complete Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) training and sign a nondisclosure agreement to keep all confidential information learned during the ride-along confidential.

Participants must be at least 18 years old. Prior to participating in a ride-along, every person must acknowledge the risks and sign a written waiver of claims and release of liability.

The participant must be in good health and must not be suffering from any illness or injury, including cold, flu or respiratory infection, on the day of the ride-along.

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331.3.2 ELIGIBILITY

The San Marcos Fire Department ride-along program is offered to residents, students and those employed within the City of San Marcos. Every attempt will be made to accommodate interested persons; however, any applicant may be disqualified without cause.

Factors that may be considered in disqualifying an applicant include but are not limited to:

- Being under 18 years of age.
- Prior criminal history.
- Pending criminal action.
- Pending lawsuit against the Department.
- Denial by any supervisor.
- Poor health or other condition that cannot be reasonably accommodated.

331.3.3 AVAILABILITY

The ride-along program is available on most days of the week, with certain exceptions. The ride-along times are established by the Operations Assistant Chief. Exceptions to this schedule may be made as approved by the Fire Chief, Fire Marshal or the Operations Assistant Chief. Ride-along will be from 7:00 am to 10:00 pm. No rider will be permitted to stay overnight at the fire station.

331.3.4 SUITABLE ATTIRE

Any person approved to ride-along is required to be suitably dressed in a collared shirt, blouse or jacket, slacks and shoes. Sandals, t-shirts, tank tops, shorts and ripped or torn blue jeans are not permitted. Hats and ball caps will not be worn in the fire apparatus. Jewelry and tattoos should comply with the Personal Appearance Standards Policy. The Operations Assistant Chief or Captain may refuse a ride-along to anyone not properly dressed.

Members of the Citizens Fire Academy (CFA) are allowed to wear the approved CFA t-shirt.

331.4 FIREFIGHTER RIDE-ALONGS

Off-duty members of this department or any other fire service agency will not be permitted to ride-along with on-duty firefighters without the express consent of the Operations Assistant Chief or the authorized designee. In the event that such a ride-along is permitted, the off-duty member shall not be considered on-duty and shall not represent him/herself as a firefighter or participate in any fire service activity except as emergency circumstances may require.

331.5 CAPTAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

The Captain shall advise the on-duty Battalion Chief that a ride-along is present in the fire apparatus before going into service. Captains shall consider the safety of the ride-along at all times. Captains should use discretion when encountering a potentially dangerous situation and, if feasible, require the participant to remain in the fire apparatus.

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331.6 CONTROL OF RIDE-ALONG

The Captain shall maintain control over the ride-along at all times and instruct him/her in the conditions that necessarily limit participation. These instructions should include:

- (a) The ride-along will follow the lawful directions of any department member.
- (b) The ride-along will not become involved in any investigation, discussions with victims or handling any fire equipment.
- (c) Either the ride-along or the Captain may terminate the ride at any time. Reasonable effort will be made to return the observer to his/her home or to the fire station if the ride is terminated.
- (d) Captains will not allow ride-alongs to be present in any residence or situation that would jeopardize their safety or cause undue stress or embarrassment to a victim or any other citizen.
- (e) Under no circumstance shall a civilian ride-along be permitted to enter a private residence with the fire crew without the express consent of the resident or other authorized person.

Attachments

Ride Out Liability Release.pdf

RELEASE, WAIVER OF LIABILITY, AND CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

The undersigned ("Undersigned") has decided voluntarily to, and does hereby specifically request, authorization to ride in emergency response vehicles or apparatus operated by the San Marcos Fire Department ("Department") in the normal course of the Department's operations, for the limited purpose of observation ("Ride-Along"). In consideration of being permitted to Ride-Along and observe the operations of the Department, I, the Undersigned, for myself, and my personal representative, heirs, and next of kin:

1. Represent and warrant that I am at least eighteen (18) years of age.
2. Represent and warrant that this release is made by me voluntarily and without any mental, physical or economic duress.
3. Acknowledge, agree, and represent that if I feel anything to be unsafe or unlawful in connection with the Ride-Along, I will, as soon as practicable, advise the operator of the emergency response vehicle or apparatus and the appropriate Battalion Chief on duty of such, and if necessary cease further participation in the Ride-Along.
4. Hereby acknowledge that the Ride-Along: 1) may involve the operation of motor vehicles through various vehicle handling maneuvers and may involve exposure to considerable danger, as well as stressful or disturbing situations, 2) is inherently dangerous and 3) involves the risk of some or all of the following: serious injury, death, or property damage. I further agree to properly wear my safety belt at all times while in a Department vehicle and to properly utilize all safety gear or equipment provided to me for my use during the Ride-Along. I also expressly acknowledge that it is my responsibility to determine my fitness to participate in the Ride-Along, and to notify the Department of any physical or medical conditions that might have an effect on the advisability or appropriateness of my participation in the Ride-Along, or that might make my participation unduly dangerous.
5. Hereby acknowledge that I will retain my status as a civilian and will have none of the powers, protections or benefits of an employee of the Department and may not have any of the protections provided by law to emergency services providers. I further acknowledge that I will have no role, other than that of an observer, unless specifically directed to take action by a member of the Department.
6. Represent and warrant that I am not impaired by alcohol, drugs, medication, illness, fatigue, or injury and will conduct myself in a professional manner at all times during my Ride-Along.
7. **Hereby release and discharge the City of San Marcos, Texas, and all of its present and former agents, employees, officials and representatives in their official, individual and representative capacities (collectively referred to hereinafter as the "City") from any and all claims, demands, causes of action, judgments, liens and expenses (including attorney's and expert witness fees), costs and damages (whether common law, statutory or constitutional and whether actual, punitive, consequential or incidental), of any conceivable character, due to or arising from injuries to persons (including death) or to property (both real and personal) created by, arising from or in any manner relating to my participation in the program and activities for which this Release is given. THIS RELEASE EXPRESSLY INCLUDES LIABILITY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE NEGLIGENCE OF THE CITY OR OTHER**

RELEASED PARTY AND LIABILITY ASSESSED WITHOUT REGARD TO FAULT OR ASSESSED IN THE ABSENCE OF FAULT.

- 8. Acknowledge that the execution of this release shall not constitute a waiver by the City of the defense of governmental immunity or official immunity, where applicable, or any other defense recognized by the state or federal courts.

- 9. Acknowledge that all patients' Protected Health Information ("PHI") which includes patient medical and financial information, employee records, and any other individually identifiable information of a private or sensitive nature are considered confidential information and that I must comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act ("HIPAA") privacy and security regulations and all other applicable laws with respect to maintaining the confidentiality of such information. Confidential information and PHI should not be read, discussed, or disclosed by me unless necessary for me to assist a firefighter in his or her specific job function. I acknowledge that the unauthorized disclosure of PHI or other confidential information to unauthorized persons, or unauthorized access to, or misuse, theft, destruction, alteration, or sabotage of such information, can subject me to civil and criminal liability and that discussing or revealing PHI or other confidential information to friends or family members is prohibited and an example of an inappropriate disclosure of such information.

- 10. Authorize the San Marcos Fire Department to conduct a Criminal Background check.

- 11. Acknowledge, by my signature below, that I understand that the PHI, other confidential records, and data to which I have knowledge and access in the course of my Ride Along with the Department are to be kept confidential. I understand that my duty to maintain confidentiality continues even after my Ride-Along is over.

I HAVE READ THIS RELEASE, WAIVER OF LIABILITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT AND FULLY UNDERSTAND ITS TERMS. I UNDERSTAND THAT I HAVE GIVEN UP SUBSTANTIAL RIGHTS BY SIGNING IT, AND HAVE SIGNED IT FREELY AND VOLUNTARILY WITHOUT ANY INDUCEMENT, ASSURANCE OR GUARANTEE BEING MADE TO ME AND INTEND MY SIGNATURE TO BE A COMPLETE AND UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF ALL LIABILITY TO THE GREATEST EXTENT ALLOWED BY LAW.

Date of Ride-Along: _____, 20____.

Signed this ____ day of _____, 20____.

Battalion Chief (Please Print)

Rider's Full Name (Please Print)

Battalion Chief (Signature)

Rider's Signature

Assistant Chief (Please Print)

Address

Assistant Chief (Signature)

Telephone

Date of Birth

Email Address