




# 2024 MEDIA GUIDE


## For our media partners

This guide provides a brief overview of the Bluffton Township Fire District. It is intended to assist media representatives as they develop news packages that may involve our organization.

### BLUFFTON TOWNSHIP FIRE DISTRICT

(843) 757-2800 

[www.BlufftonFD.com](http://www.BlufftonFD.com) 

357 Fording Island Rd.   
Bluffton, SC 29909

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A background image showing several red and white fire trucks from the Bluffton Township Fire District. The trucks are parked in a row, with trees and a building visible in the background. The text is overlaid on this image.

# SUMMARY

The purpose of this guide is to direct our media partners to the resources available through the Bluffton Township Fire District. Like our partners, the Bluffton Township Fire District operates 24/7, 52 weeks a year and like you, we serve the citizens of our community, partly, through the collection and dissemination of important, timely public safety information.

The Fire District Public Information Office responds to media inquiries as quickly, accurately, and concisely as possible. This guide is a part of our organization's general philosophy to operate in an open and cooperative partnership with our community.

Information released through the Bluffton Township Fire District will be done in accordance with the district's media policy and South Carolina law. This guide is a basic reference and does not cover every possible interaction our media partners may encounter when working with us.


The purpose of this guide is to help you know:

- What information is available from our office.
- How to best access available information.
- When & why information may *not* be available.
- How to access information from our agency during breaking news or critical incidents.
- How to obtain information for story background and support such as fire statistics or trends.
- Who is available from BTFD to speak on a variety of public safety, emergency management, and other relevant subjects.



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*The Bluffton Township Fire District's mission is to efficiently protect the lives and property of our community in a kind and professional manner.*

In 1852, the Town of Bluffton was officially established by the South Carolina General Assembly. Throughout its rich history, the town has survived many tumultuous times including South Carolina's secession from the Union, the burning of the town in the civil war, hurricanes, and other challenges. It became part of a major commercial traffic route due to its location on the May River.

Eventually, the town evolved into a summer retreat area due to its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. This brought prosperity to the area and moved Bluffton to where it is today. Today, the area is predominantly residential and light commercial, with no significant heavy industrial attributes. As the area continues to grow, the fire district is challenged to address the rapid development and population increases.

The Bluffton Township Fire District was formally founded in 1978 by the Beaufort County Council as a special fire tax district to provide emergency services in the southern portion of the County and the Town of Bluffton.

Initially, the district was made up of three independent volunteer fire departments – Chelsea (Station 32), Pritchardville (Station 31), and Bluffton (Station 30). These local departments were created by concerned citizens seeing a need for fire and medical services in the area prior to the County combining them into a single department in 1978.

Over the years, the department evolved from a volunteer service and eventually hired paid firefighters. In 2007, the district became a fully career department that now serves a population of approximately 75,000 residents with 170 personnel within its 246 square miles.

Today, the Bluffton Township Fire District is committed to protecting the lives and property of its citizens, while providing proactive all-hazards public safety services to address all its community's risks from nine stations, located strategically throughout its jurisdiction. The district embraces quality service and excellence in all it does.

# OUR RICH HISTORY

# HOW TO GET INFO

## WEEKDAYS - BUSINESS HOURS

The Public Information Office normal operational hours are Monday through Thursday 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. holidays being the exception.

During regular business hours, a PIO is available to provide information, updates, and answer questions. Please call or email us for assistance. Emails should be sent to [pio@blufftonfd.com](mailto:pio@blufftonfd.com) to ensure the information request is received and processed in a timely manner. Phone calls should be made to the PIO Office at (843) 757-2800, Extension 2702.

## AFTER HOURS & ON-CALL PIO

A PIO will always be on-call for major breaking news. After hours, the on-call PIO may not have information immediately available, depending on the nature of the event, but will answer questions and provide updates as soon as information is confirmed. Additionally, as appropriate, we will share critical information through our social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (@BlufftonFire). If an incident results in the calling of a media briefing, we will notify our media partners at least one-half hour prior to the scheduled start time.

If you call, text, or email the on-call PIO after hours or on weekends, please be sure to provide us with as much detail about the incident in question, as well as the deadline for your organization. Every effort will be made to return your call as soon as possible and accommodate your request, however, if the situation is not urgent, you may not receive a response until the next business day.





STEPHEN COMBS  
PUBLIC INFORMATION  
OFFICER

pio@blufftonfd.com  
(843) 949-4255 – Office  
(854) 683-6411 - Cellular

# SOURCES FOR OUR INFORMATION

## BREAKING NEWS

Breaking news is often posted first on our social media accounts as **@BlufftonFD** on Facebook, Twitter & Instagram.

Social media updates on breaking news may be posted prior to emailed information and in some cases may take the place of an email.

Follow Bluffton Township Fire District on the above-mentioned platforms for timely updates. BTFD also uses Nextdoor, Neighbors, and LinkedIn for communication with the community, but breaking news will not be available on these applications.

## WEB PAGE

**BlufftonFD.com** is where general information about the organization's structure and services can be found. Information on the website may include statistics, events, agency contacts, and more.

## NEWS RELEASES

Beginning in 2023, BTFD news releases will be posted to the website under the *Public Information* tab once they have been disseminated to our media partners.

If you are not currently receiving agency news releases but would like to be added to our media distribution list, please send an email to **pio@BlufftonFD.com** from your organizational email account, and we'll be sure to add you to our growing list of media partners.

# MEET OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

## COMMAND STAFF



**PAUL BOULWARE**  
**FIRE CHIEF**

[Boulware@BlufftonFD.com](mailto:Boulware@BlufftonFD.com)



**DEREK CHURCH**  
**DEPUTY CHIEF OF  
ADMINISTRATION**

[Church@BlufftonFD.com](mailto:Church@BlufftonFD.com)



**ADAM CORN**  
**ASSISTANT CHIEF  
OF OPERATIONS**

[Corn@BlufftonFD.com](mailto:Corn@BlufftonFD.com)



# MEET OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

## ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF



**RHETT LIVINGSTON**  
**BATTALION CHIEF**  
**ACCREDITATION**  
[Livingston@BlufftonFD.com](mailto:Livingston@BlufftonFD.com)



**STEVE MCKINLEY**  
**BATTALION CHIEF**  
**MAINTENANCE DIVISION**  
[McKinley@BlufftonFD.com](mailto:McKinley@BlufftonFD.com)



**TERRY SHERIFF**  
**BATTALION CHIEF**  
**COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION**  
[Sheriff@BlufftonFD.com](mailto:Sheriff@BlufftonFD.com)



**DAN WILTSE**  
**FIRE MARSHAL**  
**FIRE PREVENTION**  
[Wiltse@BlufftonFD.com](mailto:Wiltse@BlufftonFD.com)

# MEET OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

## OPERATIONS STAFF

### BATTALION 35



**BEN RUSHING**  
**BATTALION CHIEF**  
**SHIFT 1**

Rushing@BlufftonFD.com



**DEREK FRANKS**  
**BATTALION CHIEF**  
**SHIFT 2**

Franks@BlufftonFD.com



**TODD HARVEY**  
**BATTALION CHIEF**  
**SHIFT #3**

Harvey@BlufftonFD.com

### BATTALION 38



**JAYME BEACH**  
**BATTALION CHIEF**  
**SHIFT 1**

Beach@BlufftonFD.com



**VERNON EDENFIELD**  
**BATTALION CHIEF**  
**SHIFT 2**

Edenfield@BlufftonFD.com



**MIKE REHILL**  
**BATTALION CHIEF**  
**SHIFT 3**

Rehill@BlufftonFD.com

### TRAINING DIVISION



**PAUL HARRELSON**  
**BATTALION CHIEF**  
**TRAINING**

Harrelson@BlufftonFD.com

# EMERGENCY RESPONSE INFORMATION

## WHAT INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE?

Generally, the Public Information Office can provide information on the type or nature of an event which occurred or is occurring in the jurisdiction of the Bluffton Township Fire District. The information will include:

- Location\*
- Date & time
- Nature of incident
- Any damages associated with the incident.
- General description of the incident.
- Apparatus involved in the response.

\*If the location of an incident may identify victims, this information may not be available.

## WHAT INFORMATION MAY BE AVAILABLE?

Specific cause and manner of death is determined by the Coroner. Our office will not provide that information unless officially determined by the Coroner and appropriate notifications have been made to family.

General descriptions of injuries sustained may be provided, but no specific medical conditions will be provided in accordance with HIPAA regulations and South Carolina law.

## WHAT INFORMATION IS NOT AVAILABLE?

The Public Information Office will NOT provide the following information:

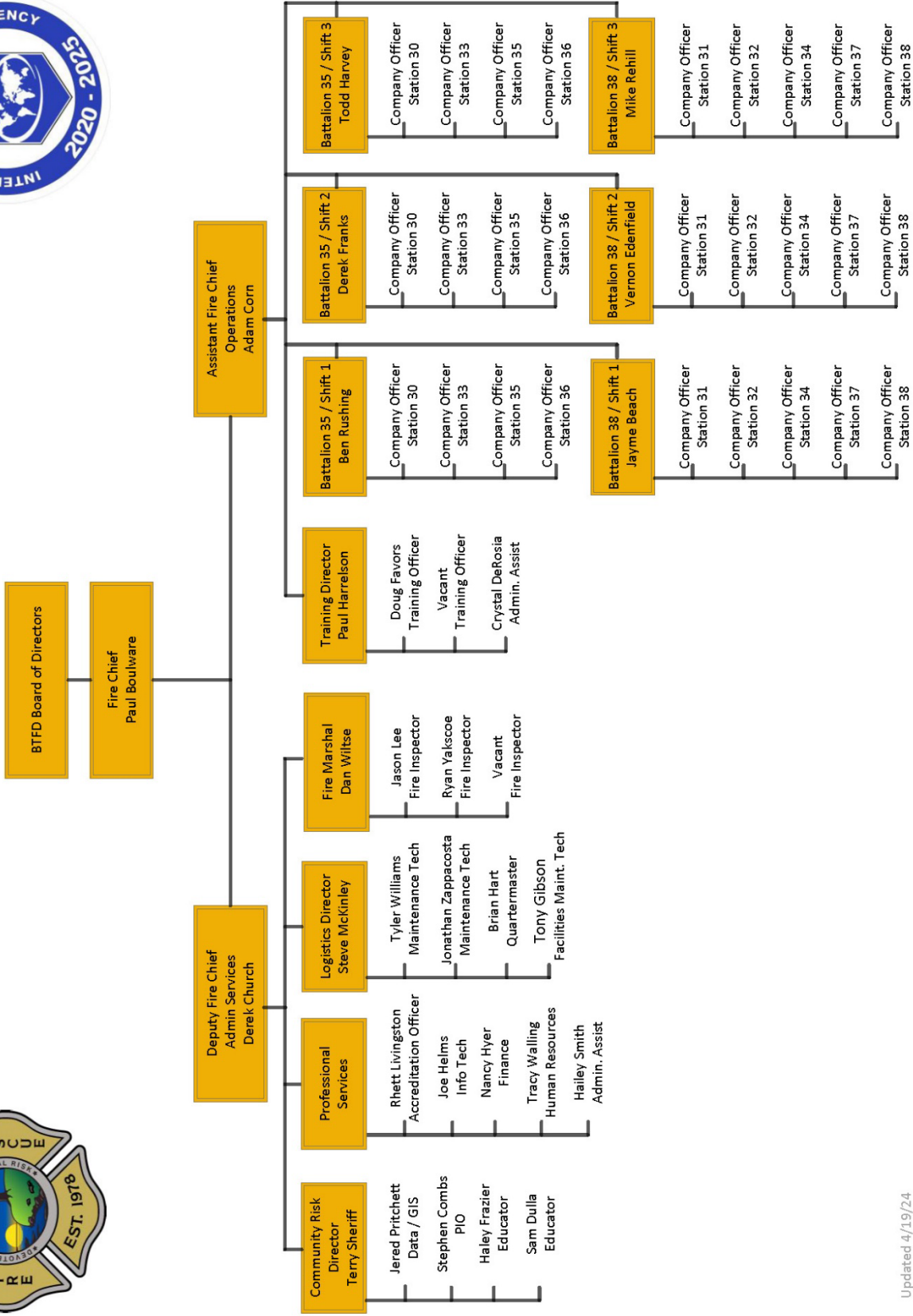
- Identity or address of victims
- Information regarding crimes or incidents within the jurisdiction of any of the municipalities unless BTFD is the primary investigating agency.
- Identity or address of witnesses.
- Identity of juvenile victims
- Medical conditions or injuries occurring as a result of an incident unless permission is specifically provided by the victim or the victim's family.
- Information that, if prematurely released, would interfere with an investigation or the apprehension of a suspect. This may include the nature of leads, specifics of a motive, details of a crime known only to the perpetrator or law enforcement, and information that may cause a suspect to flee or avoid arrest.
- Evidence that may adversely affect a court proceeding.
- Information relating to proposed or utilized security plans and devices (S.C. Code Ann. §30-4-20)
- Information of a personal nature (S.C. Code Ann. §30-4-40)
- Status of individuals turned over to the SC Department of Social Services or the SC Department of Mental Health.\*

\*Bluffton Township Fire District routinely handles situations with individuals who have been diagnosed with or are suspected of having a mental health condition. This is a medical condition protected under HIPAA and the medical records provisions of the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act. Child protection matters are also protected by law. Children taken into protective custody for whatever reason are provided protection of their identities and status under state and federal statutes.



# Bluffton Township Fire District

## Organizational Structure 2024



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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## **WILL THERE BE A SPECIAL PERIMETER SET UP FOR MEDIA AT FIRE SCENES?**

Generally, there will not be a specific area established for our media partners. If it is safe for media personnel, it must also be safe for the general public. In very limited cases, media may be allowed in a restricted area for better access, but in such cases, personnel will be escorted to minimize encroachment on a scene and the potential for interfering with any investigation.

## **CAN I GET UPDATES ON MAJOR INCIDENTS OVER THE WEEKEND?**

Please plan ahead if you want to do a weekend update on a major, ongoing case. The on-call PIO will handle media requests but, generally, no information will be available for major cases already under investigation. The Fire Marshal will not provide case updates unless there are significant developments in a major case.

## **CAN I GET AN INTERVIEW WITH THE VICTIM OF A FIRE?**

Our commitment is to assist victims by preserving their privacy, dignity, and safety. Anything else would be unprofessional and may present a moral and ethical dilemma to which our agency does not wish to be a party.

## **IS IT POSSIBLE TO GET FIRE STATISTICS FROM BTFD BEYOND WHAT MAY BE FOUND ON THE INTERNET?**

Maybe. The BTFD Community Risk Reduction tracks statistical information related to compliance with state and federal guidelines. Statistics provided by Community Risk Reduction are limited to only that information collected by our agency. Depending upon the type and amount of information requested, it may take several days to provide it, so please plan ahead if you are working on a news package. Same day requests for statistical information will likely not be available.

## **HOW IS THE FIRE DISTRICT STAFFED DAILY?**

The most basic unit serving the community is called a company. Typically, a company is made up of a single fire apparatus and its crew. The company is supervised by an officer, generally a Lieutenant or Captain. An example would be an engine staffed with a driver, an officer, and one or two jump personnel. The fire district currently has eight engine companies across its 9 stations.

The next level would be a battalion. A battalion is made up of 4 or 5 stations and the companies that are housed in them. BTFD has two Battalion Chief serving each shift. One is headquartered at Station 35 (Fording Island Rd.) and the other at Station 38 (Hampton Parkway). Each Battalion vehicle has two personnel assigned to it.

In addition to the engines and battalion vehicles, BTFD has three special purpose companies. These are a ladder (truck), quint, and rescue. The truck and quint are similar in that they both have hydraulic ladders; however, the quint carries water whereas the truck must be fed by an engine. The rescue truck does not have a fire hose or a water pump and mainly is used for incidents requiring specialized rescue tools.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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## **I'M WORKING ON A STORY ABOUT A COLLISION, CAN YOU PROVIDE ME WITH INFORMATION ABOUT THE INCIDENT?**

Generally, no. Law enforcement is responsible for accident investigations, and we can only speak to our response and the equipment and personnel dispatched to a scene. We generally will refer questions related to injuries to the Beaufort County EMS Public Information Officer. Questions related to fatalities will be referred to the Beaufort County Coroner's Office.

## **CAN WE DO A LIVE SHOT DURING A FIRE OR MOTOR VEHICLE COLLISION?**

A concern of live streams, during an on-going critical incident, is they may reveal potential patients or fatalities before family members are notified. In situations such as these, we will provide our media partners with a safe vantage point to record video for broadcast once the scene is deemed safe.

## **WHY DO FIREFIGHTERS HAVE DIFFERENT HELMET & REFLECTOR COLORS?**

Fire departments across the country use helmet colors to quickly identify personnel on an emergency scene. The colors often vary by organization but generally follow a similar pattern.

For Bluffton Township Fire District, Chief Officers (Fire Chief, Deputy Chief, and Assistant Chief) wear white helmets, Officers (Station Captains, Captain, & Lieutenants) wear red helmets, Firefighter IV and III wear black helmets with yellow reflective tetrahedrons, and Firefighters II and I wear black helmets with Orange reflective tetrahedrons.

## **WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INSIGNIA ON SHIRT COLLARS?**

If a journalist is referencing an employee of BTFD, that employee should be referred to as a "firefighter," or by their rank within our agency. The ranks within our agency include, from highest to lowest, Chief, Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief, Battalion Chief, Station Captain, Captain, Lieutenant, Firefighter IV, Firefighter III, Firefighter II, Firefighter I, and Recruit. Also, all firefighters are required to be either an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) or a Paramedic. These certifications are achieved through the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians® and must be completed within the first year of employment.

Firefighters I through IV wear collar insignia with the fire district's abbreviations, B.T.F.D. Officers wear collar insignia identifying rank as described below.

- Chief of the Fire Department - Five crossed trumpets
- Deputy Chief - Four crossed trumpets
- Assistant Chief - Three crossed trumpets
- Battalion Chief - Two crossed trumpets
- Captain - Two parallel trumpets
- Lieutenant - One trumpet

# ACCREDITATION

The Bluffton Township Fire District achieved a historic milestone on October 27, 2020. It was awarded Accredited Agency Status by the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI). Bluffton Township Fire District is one of just over 300 agencies in the world to achieve this coveted status.

The Accreditation model is a self-assessment and evaluation improvement model that focuses on a comprehensive examination of all characteristics of the district to understand its performance.

Accredited agencies are often described as being community-focused, data-driven, outcome-focused, strategic-minded, well organized, properly equipped, properly staffed and well trained. The process typically takes three to five years to complete.

Accreditation is an international recognition of achievement. It shows to your community that your agency continually self-assesses, looks for opportunities for improvement, and is transparent and accountable through third party verification and validation.

Accreditation status is recognized as a measure of excellence within the fire service. It is a commitment by the district's leadership to embrace a continuous improvement model to provide the best comprehensive service it can deliver to the public.



# FIRE DISTRICT BOARD



**RICK KROB**  
**CHAIRMAN**  
DISTRICT 5



**NATALIE MAJORKIEWICZ**  
**BOARD MEMBER**  
DISTRICT 6



**JOSEPH PAOLO**  
**BOARD MEMBER**  
DISTRICT 7



**ELAINE LUST**  
**VICE CHAIR**  
DISTRICT 8



**PAUL HAMILTON**  
**BOARD MEMBER**  
DISTRICT 9



**DANA MARSH**  
**TREASURER**  
AT-LARGE



**BILL RICKETT**  
**BOARD MEMBER**  
TOWN OF BLUFFTON

The Fire Board is responsible for the general oversight policy of the Fire District. The Fire Board works closely with the Fire Chief. It makes recommendations to the County Council on matters such as annual operating budgets, expenditures for equipment, personnel, and facilities, and other business-related matters of the Fire District.

The Fire Board consists of seven (7) members who are appointed to four (4) year terms by the County Council. There is one member for each of the five (5) County Council Districts within the protection area of the Fire District, one (1) member representing the Town of Bluffton, and one (1) member serving at-large.

Board Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month at 4:00PM at Station 35, 357 Fording Island Road, Bluffton, SC 29909.



# STATIONS

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## **30 – OLD TOWN**

199 BURNT CHURCH RD.  
BLUFFTON, SC 29910



## **31 – PRITCHARDVILLE**

31 RED BARN RD.  
BLUFFTON, SC 29910



## **32 – CALLAWASSIE**

155 CALLAWASSIE DR.  
OKATIE, SC 29909



## **33 – MOSS CREEK**

12 BUCKINGHAM PLANTATION DR.  
BLUFFTON, SC 29910



## **34 – SUN CITY**

25 WILLIAM POPE DR.  
OKATIE, SC 29909



### **35 – HEADQUARTERS**

357 FORDING ISLAND RD.  
BLUFFTON, SC 29909



### **36 – COLLETON RIVER**

254 SAWMILL CREEK RD.  
BLUFFTON, SC 29910



### **37 – PALMETTO BLUFF**

568 OLD PALMETTO BLUFF RD.  
BLUFFTON, SC 29910



### **38 – HAMPTON PARKWAY**

260 RAIDER DR.  
BLUFFTON, SC 29910



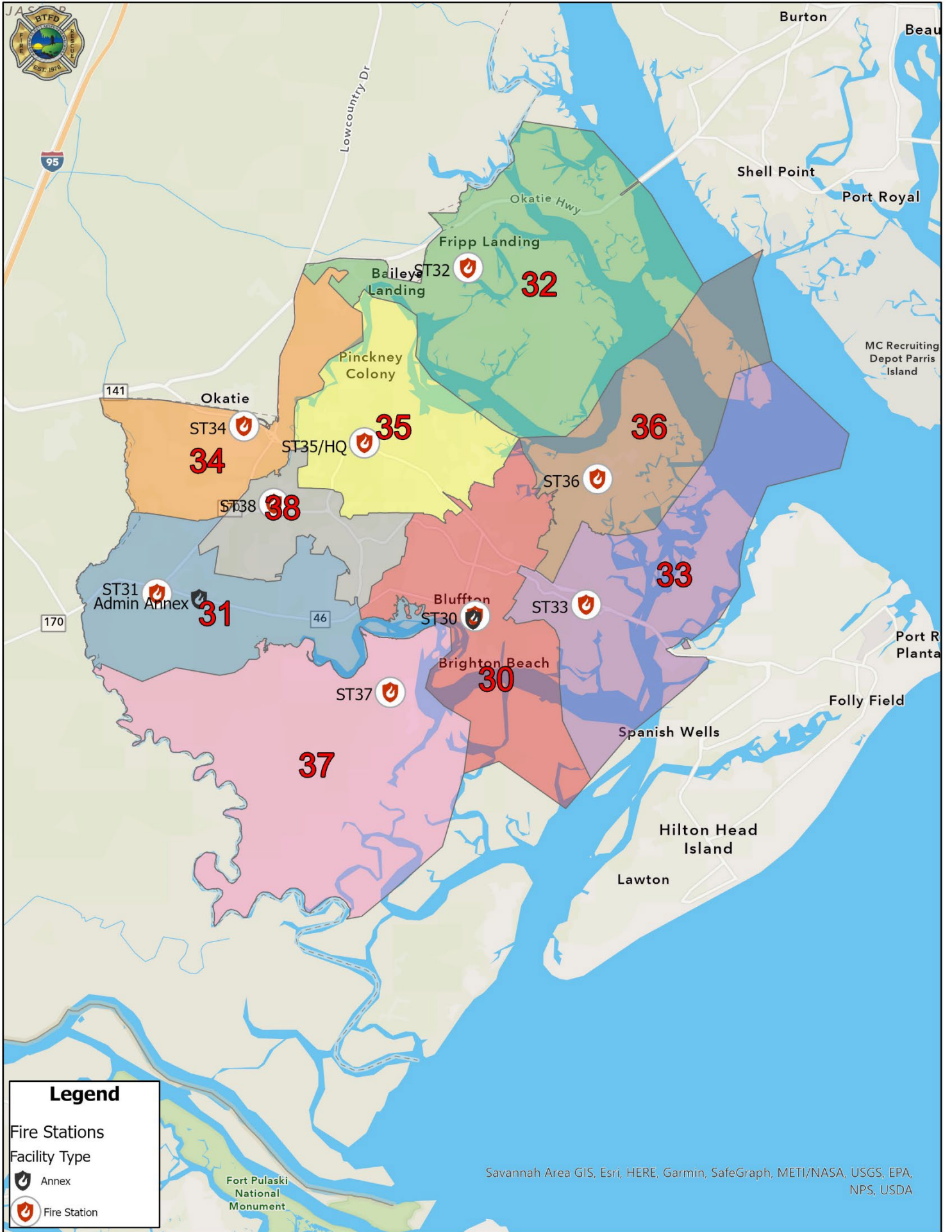
### **ADMINISTRATIVE ANNEX**

178 MAY RIVER RD.  
BLUFFTON, SC 29910



### **MAINTENANCE & TRAINING**

19 ULMER RD.  
BLUFFTON, SC 29910





BLUFFTON TOWNSHIP FIRE DISTRICT  
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Social Media  
@BlufftonFD