

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



City of Duluth - Fire Department

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DATE: 1/14/2022

SUBJECT: Duluth Fire Department saw a 56% increase in water emergency calls in 2021

BY: Kate Van Daele, Public Information Officer

NATURE OF INCIDENT:

CASE NO.:

INCIDENT DATE:

INCIDENT TIME:

INCIDENT LOCATION:

Duluth Fire Department saw a 56% increase in water emergency calls in 2021

[Duluth, MN] Record heat wasn't the only thing that was hot in Duluth in 2021; the Duluth Fire Department saw a 56% increase in water emergencies last year. The Department has tracked water emergencies since 2016, when 15 were reported. The Department saw increases in 2017 with 18, 2019 had 19, and 2020 had 28 respectively. Water emergencies decreased in 2020 with 25 calls, only to skyrocket in 2021 with 39 calls for service.

The Department issued 13 high risk of rip current warnings in 2021. On three of those dates, the Department responded to water emergencies. In all three instances, those who were rescued were transported to the hospital to be evaluated.

"We take water emergencies like any emergency very seriously," Fire Chief Shawn Krizaj said. "Duluth is lucky to have the amount of water that we have here, from our rivers and streams to the St. Louis River and Lake Superior. We also want the public to be safe when enjoying the water as conditions, especially in Lake Superior, can change rapidly."

The Department has worked with local partners to educate the public about rip currents through social media campaigns, electronic billboards on Park Point, and warning flags placed at beach access points with signage to explain warnings at the beach.

"We have increased the ways that we communicate risks to the community," Chief Krizaj said. "The partnerships that we have with the Parks and Recreation Department, the YMCA, Sea Grant Minnesota, Park Point Community Club, and others have really helped to spread messages about when it is safe to go in the water, and when it is not. Coming together to share messages only increases the number of people who will see them, and hopefully will help educate the public about rip current and water safety."

The Department added Marine 19, an all-hazard quick response vessel, to its fleet of assets in May of 2019. Since then, the Department has used it countless times to respond to water emergencies in Lake Superior and the St. Louis River.

"Marine 19 continues to be a huge asset for the department in how we respond to water emergencies," Chief Krizaj said. "It wasn't long ago that our crews could only respond in inflatable rescue boats, which were challenging in four-foot waves out on the lake. Marine 19 allows us to respond in challenging conditions with additional assets on board that make it easier for us to locate those who are in distress. Marine 19 was well worth the investment with the continued increase in water emergency responses that we are seeing since purchasing the boat."

The Department added Marine 1, a personal watercraft that Affinity Plus Credit Union donated in 2019. The addition of Marine 1 increased the number of water response assets to two inflatable rescue boats, one personal watercraft, a 32-foot all-hazard response vessel, two rapid deployment crafts (Banana Boat), and three rescue boards that are spread out throughout the city.

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