

UPDATE

Lingohocken Fire Company Recommends Wrightstown Township For PA Fire & Emergency Services Institute Award

By Greg Jakubowski, Chief, Lingohocken Fire Company



Wrightstown Township is a township of the Second Class of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, located in Bucks County. The Township covers 10.16 square miles, with an estimated current population of 2900, and an estimated real estate market value of \$583 million. There are approximately 14.45 miles of Township roads and 18.06 miles of state highways in the Township. Villages that are partially or fully in the Township include Pineville, Penns Park, Rushland, Wrightstown and Wycombe. Post offices that cover portions of the Township include Newtown, New Hope, Pineville, Penns Park, Rushland and Wycombe. There are at least 141 houses in the Township that are 100 years old or older. The Township's website is <http://wrightstownpa.org>. The Lingohocken Fire Company was founded in 1913, and its main station is located in the village of Wycombe, in Wrightstown Township. Wrightstown Township has supported and cooperated with the Lingohocken Fire Company strongly for decades, perhaps since the Fire Company's founding.

Wrightstown Township has a mixture of residences of all shapes and sizes, up to approximately 20,000 square feet. Many families have lived in the Township for generations, while others have recognized the beauty and value of the community and have recently moved in. The Township is within commuting distance to both Philadelphia and New York City, with residents going to both cities, and other homeowners having a 2nd, "country" home in Wrightstown. There are currently only 1 elementary school, and 2 gas stations in the Township, with a number of farms (including sod farms) and 3 major working quarries.

Along with Wrightstown Township, the Lingohocken Fire Company serves approximately 20% of Buckingham Township, and 12% of Upper Makefield Township. Fire service in this section of Bucks County is generally assigned to the closest company, versus jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction, to ensure the best service to the homeowners and businesses in the community.

Wrightstown Township has implemented numerous programs that have eased the provision of fire and emergency services in the Township:

- The Township has required that traffic lights be provided with pre-emption devices. All existing lights were provided with this equipment, and all new lights that have been

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installed are provided with this equipment, resulting in every traffic light in the Township being equipped with pre-emption equipment.

- Knox boxes have been encouraged by the Township / Fire Marshal; more than one dozen properties have now been equipped with these, allowing rapid access to the properties in an emergency. New businesses are required to have this equipment.
- The Township does not have any public water. However, they have required all new developments, and commercial buildings to install some type of water supply for firefighting purposes since at least 1988. This has resulted in almost a dozen water supply points, including dry hydrants throughout the Township. Through the efforts of the Township, each of these is equipped with a 6" female NST thread, allowing any engine company with 6" hard sleeve to draft directly from these water supply points without using any adapters. Township public works employees ensure that these water supply points are adequately flushed and operational.
- Each of the 3 full-time Public Works employees is a firefighter with the Fire Company. One is the Captain, one is the Chief Engineer, and the 3rd is an Engineer on the Company. All are very active in the Company, and live in the Township. The Township Fire Marshal/ Building Inspector/Zoning Officer is also an active firefighter, and the Township hires a part-time employee to mow township properties during the summer months, and this employee is also a firefighter. All are permitted to respond to emergencies while at work, giving the Fire Company a ready week-day force. The Fire Company has worked with the Township, loaning the Public Works employees one of the Company's 2 engines to utilize for weekday response. While the Township has always permitted its employees to respond to the Company's main station (which is not centrally located in the Township) for emergencies, providing an engine at the Township Public Works facility has significantly reduced response times during weekdays – often hitting the street in 2-3 minutes. At the same time, however, the program stripped the engine from the Company's substation, which was having manpower issues. Recent Company recruiting drives have been very successful, specifically in the substation's coverage area, with the Company now committing to purchasing a commercial-chassis engine for use by the "Township Crew." The Township Public Works Garage is running out of room, so the Township has preliminarily committed

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to expanding the garage facility to accommodate the new engine. This will allow us to continue to provide rapid response during weekday hours, while restoring full service to our substation area in Buckingham Township, which has seen about 700 new homes in the past decade.

- Wrightstown Township adopted a sprinkler ordinance 15 years ago, requiring all new/renovated buildings in Use Groups A-1, B, E, F, H, I, M, R-1, and R-2 to be sprinklered, and any new/renovated buildings of 4000 sq. ft. or greater in Groups A-2, A-3, R-3 and R-4 to be provided with an automatic fire suppression system. The regulations have also been included in the Zoning Code, which ensures that the requirements are very difficult to appeal. This has effectively resulted in almost every building/home that has been constructed since the code has been enacted having had a fire suppression system installed. The code is enforced to require most basements and garages to be sprinklered. Because of this focus on fire protection, Wrightstown experienced its first residential sprinkler save on Christmas Day, 2009. A fire began in the garage of an approximately 6000 sq. ft. home in the afternoon. By the time the first fire unit arrived on the scene 7 minutes after dispatch, the fire was extinguished. Although the home suffered a total loss of \$12,000, mostly contents, it is estimated that the damage would have been 15 times that without sprinklers. More importantly, the family, and the more than 25 firefighters who responded to the call, were able to return to their holiday celebration 33 minutes after the 911 call was received for this fire. Having dozens and dozens of buildings that are sprinklered in the Township will help ensure that should fires start in these buildings in the future, similar happy endings will result. Wrightstown Township is currently participating, along with 5 other Bucks County Communities, in a survey/study of residential sprinklers that is being coordinated by the Bucks County Fire Marshals' Association, and funded by a grant from the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition of NFPA. This study is being designed after a similar study that was done in Prince George's County, Maryland.

Wrightstown Township has had a dedicated fire tax for decades, and provides the proceeds of that tax to the Fire Company for its use. They also cover liability insurance

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costs for the Fire Company's vehicles, as well as worker's compensation insurance for the firefighters.

- The Township has provided dedicated funding to the Central Bucks Ambulance (a 3rd party community-based EMS service), which due to this funding, was able to sustain a full-time paramedic ambulance based out of Lingohocken Fire Company's main station.

Thanks to all of this ongoing planning and cooperation, the Township and the Fire Company were successful in reducing the ISO fire insurance rating for Wrightstown Township to a "6," which we believe may be the best in the region in a community with no public water, and may be among the best in the state in a community with no public water, effective November 1, 2010. We had worked on this project since 2004, with an initial rating drop in 2007 from a "9" to a "7." Following the initial rating drop, we gathered data that indicated that the average homeowner in Wrightstown Township saved between \$100-150/year, with homeowners reporting savings of up to \$500 – an estimated savings Township-wide of \$50,000-75,000 annually. The Fire Company received numerous thank you letters from residents, and despite the current economic situation, has had our best fund drives ever in the past 2 years, with many residents commenting on the ISO rating in their annual donation return. However, we weren't satisfied, and found a number of areas of further improvement, providing 2 years of additional data and demonstrations to achieve the "6." All of this was achieved working together with the Township. We believe that the drop to a "6" will now particularly impact the insurance rates for the business owners in the community.

Thanks to the support from Wrightstown Township and the Board of Supervisors, as well as the other townships that we serve, the Lingohocken Fire Company gets results and achieves numerous successes. Just in the past 12 months, Lingohocken has:

- Visited all schools in our coverage area to present fire prevention lessons
- Extricated a trapped deer from a fence on Wrightstown Road
- Extricated 5 drivers from vehicle accidents

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- Handled 22 calls for service during the stormy weekend of March 13, 2010. Provided assistance to EMS units during the several severe snowstorms that hit our area this year. In 2010 we are expecting to break by 10-20% the record for our highest # of responses in 1 year.
- Used an automated defibrillator to resuscitate a heart attack victim
- Worked for a short time on Christmas Day at a house fire in Wrightstown Township where the fire was completely extinguished by a home sprinkler system before we arrived – saving Christmas for the homeowner and more than 25 volunteer firefighters!
- Extinguished working house fires in our coverage area on Forest Grove Road, and Thompson Mill Road (with help from our neighboring cos.)
- Assisted neighboring fire companies at working fires in 6 houses, 1 barn, 2 buildings, and a church
- Won the 2010 Pennsylvania State Firemen's Association Valor Award for a 2-hour team effort to extricate the truck driver in the Hanson Quarry on Swamp Road in Wrightstown Township in July, 2009, and;
- Recruited 13 new firefighters, a 39% increase in active membership! This has resulted in record numbers of hours of training completed.

In conclusion, Wrightstown Township has done and continues to do everything right in supporting their emergency services. Their ongoing planning and efforts have borne superb results - a model community for fire protection and municipal cooperation. With this support, we are able to be exceptionally successful in our delivery of fire services to Wrightstown and surrounding communities.

Sincerely,

Greg Jakubowski, Chief, Lingohocken Fire Co.