

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Average firefighter retirement is \$27,596

Firefighters do hard work and look forward to the day when they can retire to a safer existence. They get burned and cut up on the job, and exposed to communicable diseases when responding in their roles as EMTs. Rescues can be in snow or sun, on land or water. Hazardous chemicals can also be involved.

“Firemen contribute quite lot more than average public workers toward their retirement plans,” explained Roxanne Minnehan of Helena, executive director of the Montana Public Employees’ Retirement Administration (MPERA).

“In addition to those years of irregular sleep, mental stress and hazardous workplaces,” said Minnehan, “firefighters defending the Montana public have 10.7% of their pay deducted for retirement benefits, compared to members of the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) who contribute 6.9%.

Firefighters under the Firefighters’ Unified Retirement System (FURS) are specifically excluded from, and will not receive, Social Security. Because their employer does not have to pay into Social Security, they contribute a higher amount of 14.36% into the retirement system.

“In view of the dangers of the work and the sacrifice involved in living away from home for extended periods at a firehouse, it was established long ago that 20 years of service earns them a retirement,” Minnehan said.

FURS, is one of the eight public employee retirement plans administered by MPERA. Such defined-benefit pension plans use a formula taking into account workers’ rates of pay and years of service in setting retirement pay.

Currently, there are 518 firefighters drawing benefits across the Treasure State and the average annual retirement is \$27,596. Their average age of a retiree is 67.7 years.

The Montana Board of Investments decides how the employee and employer contributions will be invested. Their state retirement fund is financially sound, although the income to it can vary from year to year. There is a separate retirement plan for volunteer firefighters.

The MPERA was established by the state legislature in 1945 and administers public worker retirement funds of some \$4 billion.

Members of the board of directors of MPERA are John Nielsen, Glendive, president; Terrence Smith, Bozeman, vice president; Darcy Halpin, Belgrade; Patrick McKittrick, Great Falls; Scott Moore, Miles City; John Paull, Butte; Dianna Porter, Butte, and Timm Twardoski, Helena.

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