

New Bedford fire fighters responded to 689 drug overdoses in 2016

It's tough being a firefighter today as cities and towns ask fire departments to take on more responsibilities with fewer resources. There was a time when fire departments mostly put out fires, but today fire departments mostly respond to medical incidents. Now equipped with Narcan, they are on the front lines of the opioid epidemic.

For example, the New Bedford Fire Department responded to **16,255 incidents in 2016** – up from 15,875 incidents in 2015. That included 648 fires and 11,668 medical responses. That means for every fire that fire fighters responded to they responded to 18 medical incidents. Of the 11,668 medical responses, 689 were drug overdose-related. That's nearly two drug overdoses a day and all in New Bedford. The New Bedford Fire Department didn't track overdose responses in 2015, but the numbers are increasing.

The New Bedford Fire Department responds to increasing calls while having roving brown outs – fire stations closing for 24 hours on a rotating basis to save money while a combined facility is being built. Also, spend any time in a fire station and you'll see they haven't been refurbished in decades.

Overdoses increased by 75% in New Bedford last year and that pace is expected to continue if not increase. The fire department is handling the 1-2 overdose calls per day now, but can they handle 2-3 calls a day in the future and still be available for other medical emergencies and fires? That's the question I hope the New Bedford City Council and Mayor are asking when considering future fire department budgets.