



Mount Desert Fire Department

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DRIVEWAY ACCESS FOR EMERGENCY VEHICLES

It has recently come to the attention of the Board of Selectman that some private driveways and private roads in its protection jurisdiction may not be accommodating to Mount Desert Fire Department apparatus and other emergency vehicles. This letter is to serve as a reminder to our valued residents of how important it is to maintain clear and unobstructed access to all structures within the Town of Mount Desert for emergency vehicle response.

The purpose of fire protection access is to allow emergency vehicles to approach a building as close as practical in order to deploy hoses, ladders and other equipment necessary for fire control and rescue operations. Firefighters are asked to respond to a multitude of emergencies in various types of buildings and locations, in all hours of the day and night, and in all types of weather conditions. Emergency responders try their best to respond to calls in a timely manner, often while negotiating narrow, winding roads and difficult terrain. Fire trucks are likely to be the largest, longest, widest and heaviest vehicles that will be driven on private road and driveways within our jurisdiction. Planning for emergency vehicle access improves safety for homeowners and their families by providing a more efficient response by firefighters and other emergency personnel arriving on scene. This is especially important in the more outlying areas where response times may be considerably longer due to increased travel times. Driveways that are not wide enough to accommodate a vehicle, that have low-lying branches that block passage-way or are unable to accommodate fire apparatus weight and believed to be hazardous will not be accessed by fire department vehicles. This can result in significant delays in response by first responders which may lead to disastrous results in the event of an emergency. It is in hopes that this notification will assist landowners, caretakers and property managers in providing the information needed to meet the requirements for fire department access.

As existing apparatus age-out and are replaced by newer models, we find the overall length and height of these vehicles are becoming increasingly larger and heavier. This is caused in part by numerous changes in emission controls brought on by way of federal legislation and the necessity to carry more equipment and water on each

apparatus. These changes have forced vehicle manufacturers to increase the engine compartment size of fire apparatus in order to accommodate the necessary emission controls and body length for more storage room. This results in fire trucks that demand a wider turning radius and a larger clearance area than ever before.

The Town of Mount Desert has developed ordinances regarding driveway maintenance and durability. These ordinances were partially drafted to allow accommodations for fire and other emergency vehicles if an emergency were to occur at your residence or on your property. In 2009 the Town of Mount Desert amended their Land Use Zoning Ordinance to include the following dimension changes in new driveway construction:

6B SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR ACTIVITIES AND LAND USES

6B.6 “Driveway Construction”:

*Part 1: **Primary access driveways** – Driveways that provide the primary access from a public or private way to a building shall hereafter be located constructed and maintained in such a manner that there is minimal potential for erosion. Adequate provisions shall be made to prevent soil erosion and sedimentation of surface waters and meet the following construction standards:*

*Minimum travel surface width: 12 feet
Minimum unobstructed width: 14.5 feet
Minimum vertical clearance: 14.5 feet*

*Part 2: **Continuation of compliance.** The minimum construction standards must be maintained at all times to provide adequate ingress and egress for emergency vehicle.*

Keep in mind that these are new construction requirements so for those property owners that have existing driveways and/or private roads, these clearance dimensions are provided a guideline only. The three most occurring problems we encounter with driveway and/or private roadway access is overgrown vegetation, restricted turning (too sharp) radius and driveways which are considerably long in length with no adequate turn-around(s). Also, during the winter months, we often are faced with roads and driveways which are not adequately cleared of snow and ice, particularly for the larger and heavier loads of a fire apparatus. In an emergency, any of these conditions can lead to increased response times, damage to emergency response vehicles and jeopardize the safety of our first responders.

If you have any questions or concerns about emergency access to your home or business, you can contact us at the addresses or phone number above, or you can request a site visit conducted by a fire department personnel. You also may want to consult with your insurance company for more information.

Respectfully yours,

Michael D. Bender, Fire Chief