

“Joyriding firefighters?”

“A letter signed by ‘very, very concerned citizens!!!!’ raised questions about practices and procedures of Manheim Township firetrucks in general, and trucks from the Eden station in particular.

“Residents charge firefighters with joyriding (“they drive all around, including through Neffsville, which has a fire station”) and blowing sirens “even when there is no call.” Residents claim this costs taxpayers money.

“Manheim Township Fire and Rescue Chief Rick Kane said, ‘I completely understand how people could have these perceptions.’ The problem may stem from changes made when Manheim Township consolidated its fire and rescue operations five years ago.

“The plan was to create one force, which eliminated the practice of the three stations painting their equipment in different colors. When consolidating, the township sold some older vehicles and acquired four identical trucks, all painted the same colors.

“That means, Kane said, that someone could see what looks like the same truck two or three times, but it’s not.

“Kane also said the number of calls made by the township -- 2,700 in 2012 -- means the trucks are running frequently. In addition to fires and accidents, Kane said, firefighters make public service calls that include fire and evacuation drills at all schools and nursing homes in the township. Firefighters must also undertake training exercises, and they use the trucks to get to training sites.

“Kane said residents also will see trucks parked at restaurants or fitness centers.

“Each truck must be manned with four firefighters before it leaves the station. It doesn’t matter whether the destination is a fire; the gym, to fulfill firefighters’ physical fitness requirements; or a restaurant, to eat lunch. The idea is to be ready at all times.

“Each truck also has a logbook of mileage, destination and reason for the trip, Kane said.

“Regarding the charge that trucks pull out with sirens blaring and lights flashing for no apparent reason, Kane said, “Yes, there are times when we pull out with lights and sirens, then we get about four blocks and get recalled.”

“Trucks may be recalled because of an accidental alarm, or because a truck has already arrived on the scene and it is determined that no additional trucks are needed.

“Finally, Kane said, each station has its own vehicle -- an SUV -- that is purchased, owned, insured and maintained by the volunteers at the station. That vehicle is used by the staff duty officer on call, who may drive the vehicle home so it’s accessible for answering calls.

“Kane stressed, however, that even though the three vehicles are all striped with the fire and rescue service colors, ‘They’re not our [Manheim Township Fire and Rescue] cars.’

“They are purchased and owned by the individual stations.

“He concluded, ‘No expenses for those vehicles are allowed to be reimbursed by the township. They do not get fuel cards, and township insurance agents segregate those vehicles out so that taxpayers aren’t paying for them.’”