



<b>POLICY SECTION:</b> Administration	<b>NUMBER:</b> A-01-14	<b>PAGES:</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b> Citizen Observer Program	<b>APPLICABLE TO:</b> All Personnel	
<b>EFFECTIVE DATE:</b> October 1, 2004	<b>REVIEW DATE:</b> October 2021	<b>REVISED DATE:</b> 01/01/2016

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen G. Simon", is written over a horizontal line.

Stephen G. Simon  
Fire and Rescue Chief

This policy is for departmental use only and shall not apply in any criminal or civil proceedings. The Departmental policy should not be construed as a creation of a higher legal standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense with respect to third party claims. Violations of this directive will be the basis for departmental administrative sanctions. Violations of law will form the basis for departmental administrative sanctions. Violations of law will form the basis for civil and criminal sanctions in a recognized judicial setting.

**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Citizen Observer Program is to promote understanding of the responsibilities and achievements of the Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department in any given day.

**II. POLICY**

The Citizen Observer Program allows citizens, as well as county employees, to gain a realistic and comprehensive view of the duties of fire and rescue personnel. The Department will grant program participation without regard to age (other than minors under the age of 16), race, sex, religion, creed, or national origin.

**III. PROCEDURE**

**A. Eligibility/Application**

1. Observers must demonstrate a strong interest in pre-hospital care or firefighting and in joining Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department either as a volunteer or career member. Observers must be at least 16 years of age at the time of application and must have approval from their parent/guardian if they are 16 or 17 years of age. Special circumstances may be made for public officials, administrators, media, etc. to observe as circumstances permit.
2. All Citizen Observers must first complete a Citizen Observer & Waiver Form (attached). The form should be submitted to the Volunteer Chief of the organization the applicant wishes to ride with, or Administration Office for those wanting to ride with a career unit.
3. A complete and current Citizen Observer & Waiver Form for each observer must be on file with RCFRD Administration Office. Each form will be good for 90 days. In appropriate cases, the form may be continued for a maximum of 120 days of total observation period.

4. Each observer must have a standard criminal history record completed through the Volunteer Office before they are cleared to observe. The criminal history must meet the RCFRD guidelines to participate. Felony convictions or convictions involving moral turpitude will be grounds for disqualification. Other convictions may be grounds for disqualification on a case-by-case basis. The criminal history must be completed within 30 days prior to the first scheduled ride along.
5. No persons will be allowed to use this Citizen Observer Program to fulfill court-ordered community service time.
6. No citizen observer shall carry a weapon of any kind while on county property or while riding on apparatus.

**B. Officer-in-Charge Responsibilities**

1. The officer in charge may terminate any or all of the observer's privileges at any time for any reason.
2. The officer in charge has full and final approval as to who is permitted on the apparatus. The Officer in Charge may choose to run a call without the observer for any reason. Alternately, an observer may choose not to run a call for any reason.
3. NO observer shall ever be left in the building unattended. If the observer does not go on the call, the observer will be asked to leave the station and escorted from the building. If the team goes to dinner, etc., the observer should be asked to attend. If the observer declines the invitation, they will be asked to leave and return after the team comes back from their destination.

**C. Participant Conduct/Responsibilities**

1. Observers must wear appropriate clothing. Sandals, shorts, tank tops, sweatshirts, flip-flops, soiled clothing or clothes with holes are not appropriate clothing. The observer should be dressed appropriately for the weather (if it is cold, bring a coat, etc.) No shirts or other clothing with logos that are disrespectful, derogatory, or involve themes of a sexual nature, drugs or alcohol will be allowed. It is recommended that women not wear skirts or dresses. The Officer in Charge will make the final decisions involving clothing.
2. Observers are not permitted to wear ANY crew identification, i.e. coats, shirts, bunker gear. There will be NO EXCEPTIONS. Observers WILL NOT use the radios in the units, RCFRD/crew cellular phones, or operate ANY emergency systems (lights, sirens, squad equipment, etc.)
3. Observers who currently hold ANY certification will not be allowed to practice any skills while under observer status. Observers who hold no certifications will not be allowed to perform ANY EMS or firefighting activity.
4. Observers are not allowed to operate any county insured vehicles.

5. The observer is under the direction of Officer in Charge at all times. While on the scene, the observer is under the direction of the incident commander.
6. Observers must follow all directions of the officer in charge. No interference with patient care, scene command, safety, or normal operation of the crew will be permitted. Failure of the observer to promptly and fully comply with all directions of the Officer in Charge will result in immediate suspension from the program.
7. Observers are required to conduct themselves in a mature and respectful manner at all times--whether in the building, out to eat, on calls, etc.
8. Observers who are asked to identify themselves at any time should reply by saying that they are an observer, and they are to make no statements to anyone regarding patient care, fire scene or any operations. The Officer in Charge should make every effort to identify the observer to the patient, their family, or any other fire, rescue, police officer.
9. No Observer is to respond to the scene of any call in a personally owned or operated vehicle. This does not preclude an individual's obligation to stop and attempt to render aid if they are the first on the scene of a wreck, etc. No Observer is to run ANY calls unless they are in the building with the Officer in Charge's permission and assigned to a team for the duration of a shift.
10. The Observer must wear proper identification, as determined by the Officer in Charge, so as to be easily recognized by all citizens and Roanoke County personnel. Observer identification must be worn on the outside of all clothing and must be visible at all times, whether in the building, out to eat, on a call, etc.

**D. Roanoke County Communication Officers**

1. On-duty Communication Officers will be guided by the procedures contained in the Communication Center Handbook.
2. Communications Officers will submit to the Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Administrative Office a copy of the Fire & Rescue Citizen Observer Form for scheduling and tracking purposes. A copy of the form will also be given to the Communications Shift Supervisor for their tracking purposes.
3. Communication officers-in-training during work hours will have assigned times to participate in the Citizen Observer Program. They will be assigned by Fire & Rescue Administration.
4. When riding, Communication Officers will wear appropriate civilian attire. Should a question arise, appropriate attire will be determined by the Officer in Charge.
5. Communication Officers who are asked to identify themselves will identify themselves as a Roanoke County Communication Officer.

# Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department

## Citizen Observer Program Application & Waiver Form

The Citizen Observer Program is designed to allow citizens to gain a realistic view of the fire and rescue operations of Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department. It is our hope that the insight gained by participating in this program will be both informative and enjoyable. The following information is required to begin the application process. Fill out all three pages of this form.

(Please print clearly)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Last) (First) (Middle)

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Complete Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Work) \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

If Student- Name of School Attending: \_\_\_\_\_

PERSON TO NOTIFY IN CASE OF EMERGENCY: \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any medical condition that might affect your ability to participate in this program? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a member of a Fire/Rescue Organization? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, which one: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you participating in a Fire/Rescue Training Program? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, what type of training? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been convicted of a crime? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, explain \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Hours requested to observe: Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Please plan your observation time at least 24 hours from the date of this application for planning purposes.

# INSTRUCTIONS TO CITIZEN OBSERVER

1. Participants should include members of a business or civic group, potential applicants for the position of firefighter or rescue member in Roanoke County, or are sponsored by a Roanoke County Fire/Rescue Volunteer Organization.
2. Participant must be at least 16 years of age to ride in any Roanoke County vehicle. If the applicant is 16–17 years of age, they must have their parent or legal guardian’s permission verified by signature below.
3. Participants are required to dress in proper attire, to include clean, neat street clothes.
4. Participant must promptly follow all instructions given by the Officer in Charge during the observation time. No interference with the performance of operations shall be permitted.
5. Participants are required to conduct themselves in a mature, professional manner at all times.
6. Participants should identify themselves as a citizen observer at all times and may not under any circumstances assist in the responsibilities of the Firefighters or Rescuers.
7. The Citizen Observer Program shall be conducted at times that are convenient to the operations of the Fire and Rescue Department and limited to three times per year.
8. The observation period may be terminated at any time by the Officer in Charge.

I certify that I understand the requirements and responsibilities of participants in this program; and that I am aware of the potential risk involved with accompanying fire and rescue personnel during the performance of their duties. In consideration of the Roanoke County Fire and Rescue Department granting permission to enter in or upon any premises or vehicles which are under its actual care or constructive or passive control, I hereby waive all claims to damage or loss to my person or property which may be caused by any act, or failure to act, of the Roanoke County Fire and Rescue Department, its officers, agents or employees. I assume the risk of all dangerous conditions in, upon or about the premises or vehicles and waive any and all notice of the existence of such conditions. I have also read the RCFRD HIPAA guidelines and agree to follow them. They are attached.

I agree to allow RCFRD to complete a Name Search Request for Criminal History Record and understand that my signature on this form gives RCFRD the authority to do so.

_____	_____
Citizen Observer’s Signature	Date
_____	_____
CO Parent/Legal Guardian’s signature (if CO is 16-17 years old)	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Volunteer Officer in Charge or Career Captain in charge	Date
(If riding with Volunteer unit) (If riding with Career Unit)	
_____	_____
Signature of approval from Volunteer Chief; or Career Captain & Admin officer	Date
(Volunteer Chief or Career Captain agree to assure the C.O. follows the above instructions)	

ROANOKE COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE  
**CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT FOR  
EXTERNAL INTERNS, STUDENTS, & OBSERVERS**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name), have been informed and understand that in the capacity of a student, intern, or observer, working in conjunction with Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department (RCFRD), I will have access to and be involved in the processing of confidential patient data, including protected health information (PHI). I understand that I am obliged to maintain the confidentiality of this data at all times, both on and off duty. I understand that I am not to disclose any information to any person except as allowed by state and federal law. I understand that a violation of these confidentiality requirements is a violation of state and federal law. Violations may be reported to my sponsoring organization or institution and may result in the loss of the privilege of working with RCFRD.

I specifically agree with the following requirements:

1. I will safeguard all PHI in any form to which I have access during the tour of duty. This includes, but is not limited to: written, verbal and radio-transmitted, electronic, and photographic PHI.
2. I will avoid any action that will provide PHI to any unauthorized individual or agency. I will not make any copies of any patient records or data except as authorized by the supervisor of the unit to which I am assigned.
3. I will not remove any patient records from RCFRD premises except as authorized by RCFRD Privacy Officer.
4. I will not discuss, in any manner, with any unauthorized person, information that would lead to the identification of individuals described in patient records.
5. If I observe unauthorized access or disclosure of confidential records or data to other persons, I will report it immediately to the company officer on duty in the station to which I am assigned.

I certify by my signature below that I have read and will abide by these procedures regarding confidentiality.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student assigned riding unit \_\_\_\_\_  
Station \_\_\_\_\_  
Shift

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Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Personnel witnessing form signature:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**Please return the original signed form to RCFRD privacy officer**