



# Fire Watch

Volume 3, Issue 2

Los Angeles Fire Department

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## FIREFIGHTER SELECTION PROCESS

**W**hat does it take to be a firefighter these days? Has the application process changed much? What about the requirements - are they more stringent or less? These are questions that resurface every few years – and significant questions to address at the start of a New Year.

As with other City positions, there are still basic minimum requirements that an applicant must meet before stepping through the recruitment door. The applicant must:

- Be at least 18 years old at the time of application;
- Have a U.S. high school diploma or G.E.D. equivalent, or a California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE) certificate;
- Complete a Preliminary Background Application as part of the application process at the time of filing;
- Should have a valid California Driver's License at the time of appointment; and,
- The latest and relatively newest requirement is that the applicant must have a CPAT (Candidate Physical Abilities Test) card to show *before* he or she *even begins to apply* to be a Firefighter.



Now, what is this "CPAT" all about? CPAT is a relatively new statewide requirement for all candidates who want the title of "Firefighter." CPAT stands for the Candidate Physical Abilities Test. It is the first of many steps that the candidate must complete successfully in order to even qualify for the Academy. This means that candidates cannot be scheduled for a written examination until they submit proof that they have successfully completed the CPAT. Passing CPAT and earning the CPAT card basically proves that the applicant is physically fit to perform Firefighter duties.

The City of Los Angeles does not administer the Candidate Physical Abilities Test. CPAT is administered by independent Testing Centers located in Southern California. These Testing Centers charge the candidate

around \$150 for registration, orientation, printed material, and the actual test. If the candidate passes the test, then the Testing Center issues the candidate a CPAT card – which remains valid for exactly one year.

How difficult is it to earn a CPAT card? You decide. Below is a list and a short description

of the individual tests that comprise the CPAT. Let's pretend that you are the candidate...

To begin, you will be required to wear a 50-pound vest throughout the entire testing period. This extra weight simulates the weight of a self-contained breathing apparatus and Fire fighter protective clothing. You will then be required to complete ALL of the events listed while carrying the extra 50 pounds. You will be given a maximum of 10 minutes and 20 seconds to complete ALL tests (combined) as you *walk* from one event to the next. There are no rest periods!

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**Our Mission**

**“To preserve life and property, promote public safety, foster economic growth through leadership, management and actions, as an all-risk fire and life safety response provider.”**

**CORE VALUES**

**WE OWE THE RESIDENTS OF  
LOS ANGELES**

the highest quality of service possible, characterized by responsiveness, integrity and professionalism. We will continually strive for quality improvement.

**WE OWE THE LOS ANGELES  
FIRE DEPARTMENT**

our full commitment and dedication. We will always look beyond the traditional scope of our individual positions to promote teamwork and organizational effectiveness.

**WE OWE EACH OTHER**

a working environment characterized by trust and respect for the individual, fostering open and honest communication at all levels.

**WE OWE OURSELVES**

personal and professional growth. We will seek new knowledge and greater challenges, and strive to remain on the leading edge of our professions.

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Visit Our Website [www.lafd.org](http://www.lafd.org)

**Event 1: Stair Climb**

This event is designed to simulate the critical task of climbing stairs in full protective clothing and carrying Firefighter equipment. For starters, additional 12.5 pound weights will be placed on your shoulders (on top of the 50-pound vest you are already wearing). This means that you are now carrying an extra 75 pounds of weight as you step onto a Stepmill (a treadmill with stairs - like an escalator). You will be given 20 seconds to warm up and get familiar with the Stepmill. Once the timer starts, you must walk the Stepmill for 3 minutes and at a rate of 60 steps per minute.

**Event 2: Hose Drag**

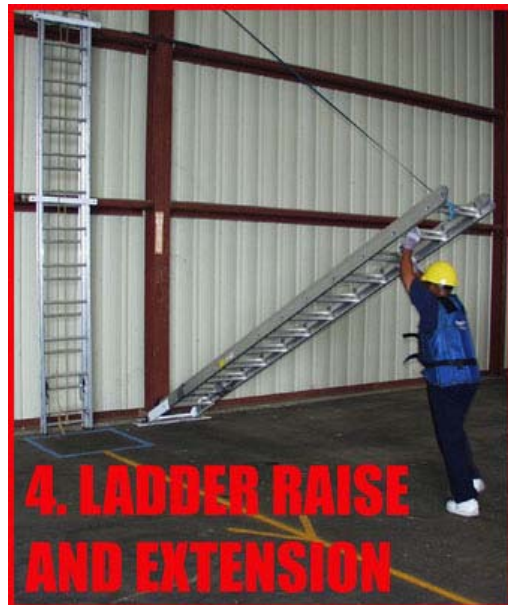
This event simulates dragging an uncharged hoseline from a fire apparatus to the fire occupancy and pulling the hose around obstacles. You will be required to do some of this while remaining stationary and kneeling on one knee.

**Event 3: Equipment Carry**

This task involves removing power tools from a fire apparatus, carrying them to and returning the equipment to the fire apparatus. The power tools used for this event are two saws. You are not allowed to drop equipment; i.e., if you drop a saw or two you are disqualified.

**Event 4: Ladder Raise and Extension**

This simulates placing a ground ladder at a fire structure, extending the ladder to a roof or window and then lowering the fly section of the ladder in a controlled fashion.



**Event 5: Forcible Entry**

This simulates the task of using force to open a locked door or to breach a wall. You will be given a 10-pound sledgehammer with which to strike a measuring device in the target area. You will be required to keep pounding away until a buzzer (attached to the target area) is activated.

**Event 6: Search**

This exercise involves crawling through an enclosed tunnel maze approximately 3 feet high, 4 feet wide, and 64 feet long. It's got two 90-degree turns. It is *pitch-black* inside the maze. Once inside, you must navigate around, over, and under obstacles – including areas that may narrow. Trainers monitor movement through the maze to ensure you are okay. There are escape hatches in case you need out – NOW!



## Event 7: Rescue

A 165-pound mannequin is used for this exercise that simulates removing a victim or injured partner from a fire scene. Example: The mannequin has a harness. You grab the harness, drag the dummy 35 feet, make a 180-degree turn, and then drag it back another 35 feet to the starting point.

## Event 8: Ceiling Breach and Pull

This event simulates the task of breaching and pulling down a ceiling to check for fire extension. To complete this test, you must remove a pike pole from a bracket and place the tip of the pole on a painted area of a hinged door in the ceiling. You must then push up and raise the 60-pound hinge door three times. Then, you take that same pike pole, hook it onto an 80-pound ceiling device and pull down on the pole five times. You repeat this process 4 times. (No dropping poles either. Drop it once and you are warned. Drop it twice and you are out!)

In the spirit of helping Firefighter candidates, the Los Angeles Fire Department does offer preparation or practice for CPAT. This provides candidates with the opportunity or opportunities (as the case may be) to practice all the tests. Candidates are welcome to practice as often as they need to until they feel comfortable enough to dish out their \$150 dollars for the real thing. Candidates interested in this program can call the Fire Department's Recruitment Office at (213) 485-8032 or go online to [www.CPATonline.org](http://www.CPATonline.org).

With the CPAT card in hand, the candidate can now move through the Firefighter application process!

In an ongoing effort to provide the best possible candidates for the Training Academy, the Los Angeles Fire Department, and the Los Angeles City Personnel Department have worked together to develop the current Firefighter Selection Process. This process has been in effect since the current round of testing began in January of 2005.

There are nine steps to the process:

1. Preliminary Background Application (PBA).
2. Minimum Requirements.

3. Written Test.
4. Interview.
5. Initial Background Review.
6. Initial Panel Review of Qualifications.
7. Field Investigation.
8. Final Panel Review for Conditional Job Offer.
9. Medical & Psychological Evaluations.

All candidates are required to place their applications on-line, as the Department no longer accepts notification cards. Applicants who do not have a computer with Internet access are encouraged to utilize computers located at public libraries and at the Personnel Department located at 700 East Temple Street in Los Angeles.

Once on-line, the applicant should log onto the City Personnel Department's website, at [www.lacity.org/per/safety.htm](http://www.lacity.org/per/safety.htm), to begin the application process. The website provides all kinds of pertinent information for applicants – including CPAT information. Applicants can also link to the Personnel website via the Fire Department's website at [www.lafd.com](http://www.lafd.com)

The following is a short description of the Application Process:

### Step 1: Preliminary Background Application (PBA)

Completing a Preliminary Background Application or PBA is the first step in the application process. This application is designed to provide the candidate with instant feedback regarding the requirements for employment as a Firefighter. It identifies any issues that the candidate should resolve before proceeding with the selection process. It also tells the candidate if he or she has a realistic chance of success in some of the more common areas of the background investigation.

### Step 2: Minimum Requirements

- Completion of the Preliminary Background Application (PBA).
- 18 years old (at the time of application).





- High School diploma, or G.E.D., or CHSPE certificate.
- Valid Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT).
- A valid EMT certificate or Paramedic license is highly desirable.
- A valid California Driver's License is required at the time of appointment.
- In addition to the above requirements, candidates should have excellent health and excellent vision. Non-smokers are preferred.

### Step 3: Written Test (Multiple Choice)

The Written Test is a two-part, Multiple Choice test. Part I tests skills in mathematics and reading comprehension. Part II measures job-related personal characteristics that have been demonstrated to be indicators of success as a Firefighter.

The Written Test is given every month. Candidates who fail the written test must wait two years before re-taking the test. A written test preparation guide is available on-line at [www.lacity.org/PER/lafd\\_writprep.htm](http://www.lacity.org/PER/lafd_writprep.htm).

### Step 4: Interview

A candidate who passes the written test qualifies to schedule an oral interview. A panel comprised of representatives from the Fire Department, the Personnel Department, and the Community conducts and scores the oral interviews. A candidate's score on the oral interview is the score that will determine the candidate's rank on the eligibility list. Scores from the oral interview are valid for two years unless the list is extended.

### Step 5: Initial Background Review

Initial Background Reviews are scheduled for candidates on the eligibility list. These Reviews are scheduled based on a candidate's rank on the eligibility list as well as on the City's hiring needs.

Part of the Initial Background Review requires the candidate to complete Personal History Forms (PHF) and questionnaires prior to the scheduled appointment. It may take as long as four hours for Background Investigation Division Staff members to conduct an initial Background Review, which involves assessing issues identified on the Personal History Form or questionnaires.

### Step 6: Initial Panel Review of Qualifications

A panel reviews qualifications, test scores, applications, interview rating sheets, and other information obtained during the Initial Background Review. This panel typically consists of a Fire Captain, a Personnel Department representative, and a Chief Officer if necessary. The most qualified candidates move on in the process. Applications of candidates who are not selected may be reviewed again should the City need additional firefighter candidates.

### Step 7: Field Investigation

A candidate selected by the Review Panel will be subject to a comprehensive background check – also called a Field investigation. Some of the factors evaluated are:

- Interpersonal skills, sensitivity and respect for others.
- Decision-making and judgment.
- Maturity and discipline.
- Honesty, integrity and personal ethics.
- Setting and achieving goals.
- Records check.



Field investigations take anywhere 30 to 180 days to complete. From here, the completed background package is forwarded to a final panel for review.



## **Step 8: Final Panel Review for Conditional Job Offer**

The Final Review Panel consists of a Chief Officer, a Fire Captain, and a Personnel Department representative. This Final Panel reviews the completed background package and determines, based on the review, whether or not to grant the candidate a conditional job offer.

## **Step 9: Medical and Psychological Evaluation**

Medical and Psychological Evaluations are the final step for a candidate who receives a conditional job offer. Candidates who successfully complete both evaluations are appointed based on the City's hiring needs.



Special thanks to Battalion Chief Brian Cummings for providing valuable input into this month's Fire Watch.

Chief Cummings is a 26-year veteran of the Los Angeles Fire Department and is currently the Commander of the Recruit Services Unit.