



State of New Jersey

OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER  
P.O. Box 024  
TRENTON, NJ 08625-0024

**CHRIS CHRISTIE**  
*Governor*  
**KIM GUADAGNO**  
*Lt. Governor*

**MARC LARKINS**  
*Acting State Comptroller*

**May 28, 2014**

**Contact: Pete McAleer**  
**609-633-2377**

## **Office of State Comptroller audit recommends personnel savings for local fire districts**

An Office of the State Comptroller audit of three New Jersey fire districts makes a series of recommendations for reducing personnel costs, including reining in annual salary increases that allowed firefighters at one fire district to triple their pay after five years of service.

The audit found Woodbridge Township Fire District No. 1 and Cherry Hill Fire District No. 13 paid its firefighters wages in 2011 that were significantly higher than not only the New Jersey average but the average salaries for firefighters in Philadelphia and New York City as well. Both fire districts also paid significant longevity and terminal leave bonuses to their employees.

In Woodbridge Township, for example, firefighters received salary increases of more than 40 percent after each of their first five years of service. Both fire districts also awarded their personnel generous longevity payments, with Cherry Hill No. 1 awarding more than \$1.2 million in such payments during the two-year period OSC reviewed.

Both fire districts have taken steps to reduce personnel costs since the start of OSC's audit. In a recently ratified collective bargaining agreement, Cherry Hill Fire District No. 13 reduced its starting salary for new employees by 18 percent and eliminated future longevity payments. Woodbridge's fire district, in its latest contract agreement, reduced its annual salary increases so that firefighters would be making top pay after eight years of service instead of six. It also reduced its longevity payments and placed a cap on payouts for terminal leave.

“Given that the main source of income for fire districts is derived from levying taxes paid by the public, firefighter compensation should strike the appropriate balance between fairly compensating employees and ensuring that services are provided in the most economical manner,” Acting State Comptroller Marc Larkins said.

OSC’s audit also recommends that Cherry Hill’s fire district increase its efforts to recruit more volunteer firefighters.

In addition to personnel costs, OSC also looked at elections in three fire districts and found fire district budgets were approved with extremely low voter turnout. Voter participation ranged from 0.6 percent in Brick Township to 1.6 percent in Cherry Hill and Woodbridge Township. New Jersey’s fire districts administer their elections on the third Saturday in February. OSC’s audit recommends the Legislature consider moving the date for fire elections to the general election in November, when turnout is considerably higher, in order to promote awareness and transparency of fire district operations.

\* \* \*

Click [here](#) to view the complete report.

Follow the Office of the State Comptroller on Twitter at @NJComptroller and visit us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NJComptroller](http://www.facebook.com/NJComptroller)