



CITY OF HARRISONBURG  
**FIRE**  
**DEPARTMENT**

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## HFD to Host First-Ever Sensory Friendly Open House

HARRISONBURG, Va. - In celebration of Autism Awareness Day, the Harrisonburg Fire Department will host an inaugural Sensory Friendly Open House at Fire Station #1, 80 Maryland Ave., on April 2, 2022, from 10:00am-12:00pm. The event will feature numerous activities and opportunities to meet with local first responders, including representatives from the Harrisonburg Fire Department, Harrisonburg Police Department, Harrisonburg Rescue Squad, and Harrisonburg Rockingham Emergency Communication Center. Attendees can try on fire gear, explore emergency vehicles, participate in a firefighter relay race, enjoy snacks and drinks, spray water, and more!

The idea to host a sensory friendly open house came from a group of Harrisonburg High School (HHS) students, who are participating in a unique program that partners them with city government agencies in service-learning opportunities. The students chose the fire department and with the help of their advisor, EMS Officer Travis Karicofe, started brainstorming ideas.

“We are very fortunate to work with local students to not only host a sensory friendly open house, but also start the conversations amongst first responders on how to respond to emergencies involving individuals with ASD in the most successful way,” said Karicofe.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a developmental disorder that causes social, communication and behavioral challenges. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), about 1 in 44 children have been identified with ASD. For people with autism, emergency situations can present many challenges, therefore it is essential that both first responders and those with ASD learn to interact effectively and safely in emergency situations.

“This is an amazing opportunity to connect with an important, yet often overlooked, segment of our community. We hope to foster more relationships and provide inclusive opportunities for people with ASD and special needs,” said Harrisonburg Fire Chief Matthew Tobia.



Parking can be found at Keister Elementary School. For more information about the event, please contact Erin Stehle at 540-432-7703 or [erin.stehle@harrisonburgva.gov](mailto:erin.stehle@harrisonburgva.gov) and for more information on Autism Spectrum Disorder, please visit [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org).

**The Harrisonburg Fire Department** is an ISO-Class II All-Hazards agency providing essential emergency and non-emergency life safety services to the public who live, work and travel in Harrisonburg. More information about the Fire Department is available on-line at [www.harrisonburgva.gov/fire](http://www.harrisonburgva.gov/fire) or on Facebook®, Twitter® and Instagram®.

**The City of Harrisonburg** is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to almost 55,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is online at [www.HarrisonburgVA.gov](http://www.HarrisonburgVA.gov).



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