



# Joseph Sandoval: Always on call

March 3, 2021

For Joseph V. Sandoval of the Laboratory’s Logistic Central Shops, an emergency can hit at any time. One minute Joseph could be doing some paperwork at the fire station or relaxing at home and the next he could be responding to a call for help in the Northern Regional Santa Fe County area. Dressed in personal protection equipment, Joseph may find himself helping extract a driver from a vehicle involved in a highway accident or crawling through a smoke-laden building, parts of which are ablaze.

Joseph is a volunteer firefighter who is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. According to the National Fire Protection Agency, as of 2018 there are approximately 745,000 volunteer firefighters in the United States, dwarfing the 370,000 career firefighters across America.

“I started volunteering when I was young,” says Joseph. “I was inspired by family and friends who were volunteer firefighters. I wanted to step up for my community, to do something different. I’ve been doing it for about 23 years and am currently a district chief in Santa Fe County.”

## Facing the blaze

Volunteer firefighters receive the same training as career firefighters to handle all types of emergency situations and fires. Joseph says it takes about 240 hours of training to become a Firefighter 1—first level firefighter.

“Our main mission is to preserve life, but to do so as safely as possible,” explains Joseph. “If we are compromised in any way, we are no longer in a position to rescue others.”

During his 23-year career, Joseph has helped put out between 250 and 300 fires. Putting fire out may seem straightforward at first glance, but Joseph notes that every fire is different.

“We must assess every scene,” says Joseph. “Figure out the type of fire—is the source electrical, gas or something else? We need to check out the area—determine if it is a structure fire or a wildfire, for example. There are lots of factors that go into what we need to do to rescue anyone in a fire and then determine how best to put it out.”

Although Joseph realizes that he is involved in a dangerous profession, he says that the voluntary position brings him great satisfaction.

“You know, I’m there to help out people in need,” Joseph says. “For me, this is my way of giving back to the community. You see a lot of bad stuff in this job—it’s exhausting

and demanding, but at the end of the day, there's nothing better than having rescued somebody or stopped further damage from what amounts to an inferno."

## Emergency response

Responding to emergencies is rewarding but challenging work. Joseph notes that stress comes naturally with the position of volunteer firefighter.

"I've learned that you have to be patient under pressure," Joseph says. "You are responding to someone else's emergency. Although it's good to be sympathetic, you also have to stay clear headed—you have a job to do and you need to do it to the best of your ability. It's a unique craft that takes unique people to be successful."

As for facing head on the hazards of firefighting, Joseph says it's also just part of the job.

"Yeah, it's always at the back of your mind—it's a position that comes with lots of dangers," Joseph says. "But our main goal is always to go home at the end of a shift. We never stop training, so that we can do our job as safely as possible. There's nothing better than saving a life."

**Los Alamos National Laboratory**

**[www.lanl.gov](http://www.lanl.gov)**

**(505) 667-7000**

**Los Alamos, NM**

Managed by Triad National Security, LLC for the U.S Department of Energy's NNSA

