



Alabama Fire Service Exploring and Cadets

Program Guidelines

June 7, 2026

Fire Service Exploring, Public Safety Cadets, and Junior Firefighters are worksite-based programs for young men and women who have completed the eighth grade and are 14 and older but have not yet reached their 21st birthday.

Fire Service Explorer posts help youth gain insight into a variety of programs that offer hands-on career activities. Exploring offers experiential learning with lots of fun-filled, hands-on activities that promote the growth and development of adolescent youth.

The Alabama Child Labor Law restricts firefighting to 18 and older. Explorers/Cadets are not firefighters and **SHALL NOT** be treated in any way as firefighters on emergency scenes. They may only fill support roles in areas deemed safe, also known as the Cold Zone or Support Zone. There are exceptions for approved training classes through the Alabama Fire College.

Explorer/Cadet Participation Requirements

- Explorer/Cadet must have application on file with the local fire department and/or the Boy Scouts of America or Public Safety Cadets.
- Explorer/Cadet must have a Waiver of Liability on file with the fire department.
- Explorer/Cadet must have a completed individual health physical statement including Hepatitis vaccine documentation on file with the department.
- All school-age Explorers/Cadets must be enrolled in school or possess a high school diploma/GED.

Explorer/Cadet Safety Issues

There are some issues and hazards specific to Explorer/Cadet programs that must be considered when organizing a post. These issues are unique compared with other types of Explorer Posts and Cadet Units, being a direct result of the Post's/Unit's affiliation with fire departments and the potential for hazards on emergency scenes.

The following is a detailed list of guidelines that must be used for the formation of a Post/Unit Youth Safety Policy. As with any program, extremes of temperature, humidity, and other atmospheric conditions should be considered during any activity. An example set of bylaws will be attached to help organizations write their own policy. Organizations may edit these bylaws to fit their policies and procedures, provided they do not contradict anything written in this document.

One issue that requires particular attention is what the Explorer/Cadet will be allowed to do at the emergency scene. After completing all requirements, departments may allow Explorers/Cadets 16 years of age and older to respond on approved apparatus with trained personnel. A detailed policy must be established as to what the Explorer/Cadet may and may not do once he or she arrives on the scene. The guidance below and attached bylaws may be referenced for the development of this policy. **DEPARTMENTS THAT ARE SPONSORING A POST/UNIT MUST HAVE THE APPROPRIATE INSURANCE POLICY IN PLACE THROUGH THEIR INSURER TO ALLOW FOR EXPLORER/CADET PARTICIPANTS TO RECEIVE COVERAGE.**

Explorer/Cadet Safety Minimum Requirements

- Explorers/Cadets **WILL NOT** be acceptable substitutes for trained personnel in any situation or incident.
- Explorers/Cadets must be equipped with personal protective equipment that is appropriate for the activity, whether in training or on an emergency scene.
- Fire departments should equip Explorers/Cadets with special colors or special indicator to differentiate them from trained personnel.
- Explorers/Cadets may be mobilized only as a post or unit, with required leadership.
- Explorers/Cadets are not on call as individuals and may not drive any vehicle to any incident.
- Explorers/Cadets who ride on apparatus or other department vehicles must be seated and must wear a seatbelt.
- Explorers/Cadets may not climb ground or aerial ladders over 35 feet or ladders not supported against a structure.
- Explorers/Cadets may not enter or perform ventilation procedures on a burning structure.
- Explorers/Cadets may not use any tools or gloves on energized electrical equipment.
- Explorers/Cadets may not operate hydraulic rescue tools or equipment on emergency scenes.
- Explorers/Cadets may not handle life nets.

Training Exceptions

- Explorers/Cadets 16 years of age and older may perform any of the skills in the Volunteer Fire Fighter/Firefighter I (VFF/FF I) Job Performance Requirement (JPR) Skill Sheets while in an official VFF class through the Alabama Fire College (AFC) with qualified instructors.
- Explorers/Cadets 16 years of age and older may engage in live fire training while in an official VFF class through the Alabama Fire College (AFC) with qualified instructors and

may only enter controlled burn buildings or use live fire props at the AFC or a Regional Training Center (RTC).

- Explorers/Cadets may use hydraulic tools during training taught by qualified personnel.
- Explorers/Cadets may engage in live fire training using controlled burn buildings, mobile fire trailers, and props during training events hosted by the AFC.
- Explorers/Cadets may climb aerial ladders during training events hosted by the AFC.
- All live fire training **MUST ONLY** be conducted at the AFC or a RTC during an official VFF/FF I class or AFC hosted training event. No acquired structures may be used for live fire training.

Approved Explorer Duties at a Fire Scene Age 16 and Older

- Explorers/Cadets may assist the Apparatus Operator (AO) in cold zone. Explorers/Cadets may enter the structure once the Incident Commander (IC) declares that operations are in salvage/overhaul stage.
- Explorers/Cadets may assist in rolling hoses, putting away gear, and other non-hazardous duties.
- Explorers/Cadets may assist with rehab, tool and equipment staging, and establishing water supply from a hydrant or other source.

Additional Permissible Duties Age 16 and Older

- Participate in fire drills.
- Attend classes in firefighting, emergency medical services (EMS), and related subjects.
- Receive and relay fire calls and alarms using radio and other communication equipment.
- Participate in the inspection of buildings, hydrants, and other structures in fire prevention programs.
- Assist in developing plans for special assignments such as emergency preparedness, communications, training programs, firefighting, hazardous materials, and EMS activities.
- Maintain fire equipment, apparatus, and facilities. Perform minor repairs to departmental equipment. Perform general maintenance work in the upkeep of fire facilities and equipment; clean and wash walls and floors; care for grounds around station; wash, hang and dry hoses; wash, clean, polish, maintain equipment.
- Present programs to the community on safety, medical, fire, and injury prevention topics for community risk reduction efforts.
- Participate in communication and computer training.
- Participate in EMS standbys.
- Participate in Explorer/Cadet meeting training.

Permissible Duties Age 14 and Older

- Participate in fire drills.
- Attend classes in firefighting, emergency medical services (EMS), and related subjects.
- Perform limited work in the upkeep of fire facilities and equipment to include cleaning and washing walls and floors, care for grounds around station (may not operate any power equipment), wash, hang and dry hoses. (Note: any and all maintenance performed by 14- or 15- year-olds to any fire equipment, apparatus, and facilities shall be under the direct supervision of a maintenance officer or fire chief.)
- Present programs to the community on safety, medical, fire, and injury prevention topics for community risk reduction efforts.
- Participate in communication and computer training.
- Participate in EMS standbys.
- Participate in Explorer/Cadet meeting training.
- ***All tasks must be performed under supervision of qualified personnel***

Riding Fire and Rescue Apparatus Requirements

- Explorer/Cadet must be **Age Sixteen (16)** to be eligible to participate in a ride-a-long program on any fire department apparatus.
- Explorer/Cadet must participate in program for minimum of six (6) months before being eligible for ride-a-long program and meet individual department basic training requirements.
- Explorer/Cadet must have documentation of successful completion of CPR and basic first aid training.
- Explorer/Cadet must have completed annual training in Blood Borne Pathogens.
- Explorer/Cadet must complete the Traffic Incident Management course.
- Department must document all training hours for each participant. Documentation should be kept on file for a minimum of five (5) years after the participant leaves the program.
- Explorer/Cadet must be under direct supervision of Adult Leadership during ride-a-long.
- Explorer/Cadet shall remain with trained personnel in the cold/support zone of an emergency incident scene.
- Explorers/Cadets may respond only during the hours they are scheduled to be at the firehouse. They may not respond individually from home.
- Explorers/Cadets may only respond from their assigned firehouse.
- Explorers/Cadets may not leave until cleared by the Officer in Charge (OIC).
- Explorers/Cadets must communicate when they arrive and leave with the OIC to maintain personnel accountability.

Driver Duties and Procedures

- Driver counts occupants before pulling out of station.
- Driver checks for occupants to be seat-belted.

Approved Vehicle Requirements

The Explorer Program has a defined list of permitted fire vehicles. Compliance with this policy is mandatory. With the exception of Command Vehicles, Quick Response Vehicles, and service trucks, drivers of permitted vehicles must have completed the Emergency Vehicle Operators Course (EVOC), Emergency Vehicle Drivers (EVD) course, Apparatus Operator (AO) course, or equivalent.

All vehicles must be completely enclosed and have DOT seatbelts and anchored interior attachments. Explorers must be seated and belted in approved apparatus before moving the apparatus.

Permitted vehicles include Command Vehicles, Quick Response Vehicles, Service Trucks, enclosed Pumper Engines holding 1000 gallons of water or less, completely enclosed Ladder Trucks excluding Tillers or Tractor Drawn Aerials, and Technical Rescue trucks.

Explorers/Cadets **MAY NOT** ride on any tanker apparatus carrying over 1000 gallons of water.

Examples of approved vehicles are shown below.

*****Explorers will not ride on any tanker apparatus*****

Departments are urged to contact their local Boy Scouts of America-Learning for Life Exploring Division or Public Safety Cadets program to help establish their own Post/Unit program. Departments that establish their own Junior Cadet programs must comply with all guidelines and restrictions within this document. Example bylaws are attached below.

Permitted Vehicles

Command Vehicle/Quick Response Vehicle/Service Truck



Pumper Engine: Completely Enclosed, 1000 Gallons or Less



Ladder Truck: Completely Enclosed, **EXCLUDING** Tiller Apparatus



Technical Rescue Truck, including Light, Medium, or Heavy Rescue

