

2025 Ontario Rescue Report



Firefighter Rescues Ontario (FFRO) has completed the 2025 rescue data analysis, capturing its second year of novel data collection.

<i>Number of Incidents</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>Number of People Impacted</i>	<i>229</i>
<i>Number of Rescues</i>	<i>183</i>
<i>Number of Fatalities</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Weekly Average - Rescues</i>	<i>3.5</i>
<i>Weekly Average - Fatalities</i>	<i>1.8</i>
<i>Survival Rate</i>	<i>60%</i>

137 incidents were captured throughout Ontario (the Province) which led to 183 people being rescued and 91 fatalities due to structure fires. 229 people total were impacted directly in 2025 from fire and it is important to note that due to the actions taken by firefighters 137 people survived with a weekly average of 3.5 rescues and 1.8 fatalities. The data builds on previous research and analytics from 2024, showcasing the continued need for effective firefighter training, education and operational performance.

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Disclaimer

No written content of this report was generated using AI. The data and writing of this report was solely completed by humans who invested countless hours capturing, synthesizing and presenting the findings. It is strongly recommended that the reader invest time to read this report in its entirety to appreciate the significance of its findings.

Introduction

With an estimated population of 16.2 million people in 2025, Ontario is entering new levels of growth and densification. (Statistics Canada, 2025) Over the past decade, deaths from fire have been steadily climbing with little to no deviation observed year over year. This has reinforced public education campaigns throughout the Province, in hopes of sharing information to the public for better fire safety preparedness. Recognizing the importance of public education and fatality numbers remaining unchanged, the third line of defence in protection of life to the public is frequently called into action. With record high incident and rescue numbers in 2025, the time is now for educated, intelligent and professional firefighting for the protection and preservation of lives of Ontarians.

In the first report (2024) of capturing civilian rescues made by firefighters in Ontario, we attempted to uncover the magnitude of impact firefighters are having on maintaining life safety. With just under three (2.7) rescues on average per week the ignorance to just how many may be happening was brought from the unknown to the known. Building off of this base, the project has evolved and we have uncovered more information to improve life safety outcomes.

Methods and Data Capturing

Building off of the success in 2024, the 2025 year's data capturing methods were as follows:

- Daily screening of google alerts emails that examine articles with keywords including but not limited to "house fire person rescued", "fatal fire", etc;
- Direct messages from members over social media indicating an incident was confirmed or vetted;
- Information was inputted into a google form which was then synchronized into a spreadsheet; then,
- At the end of the reporting period, the spreadsheet was consolidated and brought into charts and tables to examine further for any possible trends.

Data Inclusion Criteria

In order for an occurrence to be included in the report, the following criteria must have been met:

- Incidents must have occurred between January 1st and December 31st, 2025 in Ontario;
- People being rescued must be within a structure that has active smoke or fire within;
- Animals or pets were not included in any of the data for this study;
- Encampments, or other structures that are not built according to the Ontario Building Code were not included in this study;
- Incidents that reference people being evacuated at the fire scene were not accepted,
- Articles, events or other information gathered must make mention or show evidence of fire service personnel removing a victim from a building (either conscious or unconscious, alive or deceased); and,
- Incidents in which fire crews located an occupant inside the structure (alive or deceased) while performing operations were included.

Therein, unless otherwise stated, the term 'incident' for the purposes of this study, incorporates those where there were occupants inside the building at the time of fire department arrival and were either rescued or left in place and recovered later.

Rescue Definition

For the purposes of this study, the term rescue is defined as:

“Any action taken by fire service personnel that removes occupants or dwellers from a structure with fire in which they could not remove themselves without being seriously injured or killed.”

This definition expanded slightly in 2025, to capture a more accurate picture of fire service intervention that is upholding the life safety priority. This past year's (2025) working definition includes removal from areas such as:

- Occupants from balconies in apartments;
- Occupants trapped in adjacent units; and
- Occupants stuck in smoke filled hallways.

It is important to recognize that the working definition of a rescue is standardized in the Ontario Fire Marshal Standard Incident Reports (OFM SIR) manual, yet there is still subjectivity regarding what constitutes an actual rescue versus an evacuation of an occupant. (Ministry of the Solicitor General, 2025)

This project aims to provide clarity to that problem and shed light on the impact that fire department actions have on members of the public. For the purpose of this study, firefighter-initiated removal as a rescue attempt is a measure of operational activity, regardless of biological outcome. Further explanation is outlined in the discussion section.

Limitations

This project has limitations that need to be addressed before further examination:

- Limitations on the source data coming from public news media such as, underreporting, not reported, misinterpretation of the definition of a rescue, or vague information
- Limited update information. Eg: rescue that listed a patient as critical and then later passes away and is never reported.

Enhancements

The popularity of the FFRO project through social media has enhanced the data collection from followers reaching out when they are a part of an incident. This was greatly beneficial in inputting nearly ten incidents that never made it into public news media and also helped capture or confirm rescues that were misreported by the news media. Furthermore, the FFRO project has grown from one member to fifteen project team members, one of which is a career photojournalist who has been greatly helpful in clarifying reporting.

Results

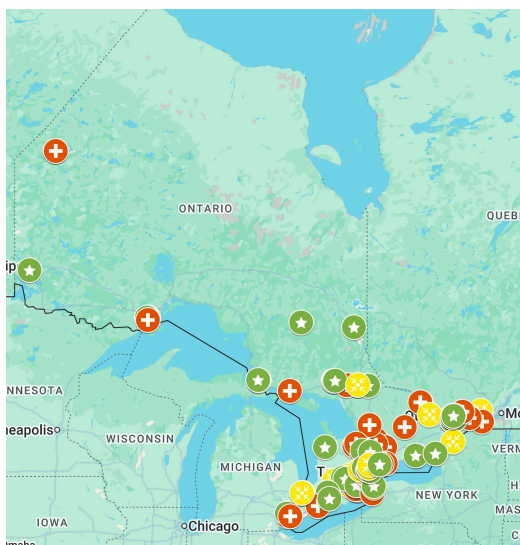


Figure 1a - Provincial Ontario Map with incident markers. Dionisio, P - 2025.

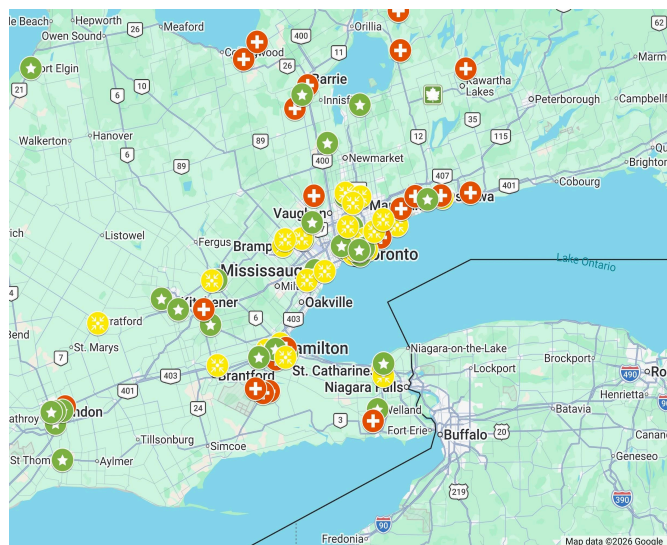


Figure 1b - Southern Ontario map highlighting incident locations. Dionisio, P - 2025.

In 2024, there were 94 incidents captured that involved a rescue or a fatality in the Province. (De Benedictis, 2025) 2025 found a 45% increase of incidents with 137 captured, averaging 3.5 per week across the Province. It is important to highlight that these incidents include those in which victims were rescued by firefighters, or were recovered after the fire event occurred. Thus, this number may include a small number of deaths that occurred prior to the fire. In total, 229 people were found to be directly impacted during this reporting period. Figures 1a and 1b highlight the geographical location of incidents and although more incidents are seen in more populated areas, there were still significant incidents that happened in rural or remote communities.

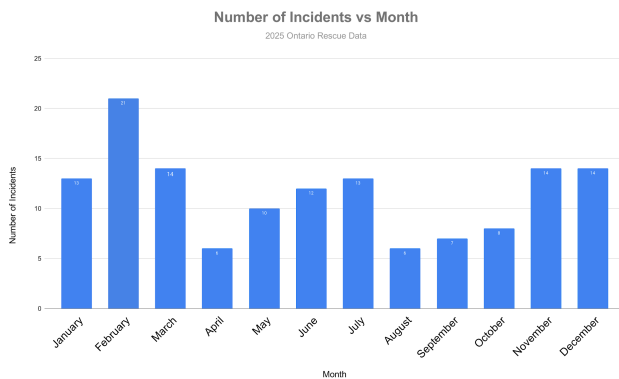


Figure 2 - Total number of incidents per month in 2025

Figure 3 compares incidents between 2024 and 2025, which shows that 2025 had more incidents with the exception of March, April and October. This can be plausible due to various factors, such as but not limited to, reporting in news media or enhanced data collection.

2025 started and ended with a significant spike in incidents and rescues/fatalities, with January seeing the highest number of rescues - thirty. Hamilton saw a significant triple fatal fire at 35 Brock street with eight people being rescued. Toronto saw one of many significant fires in January removing four people from a home in Scarborough on the 18th. January averaged 2.3 rescues per incident. Much higher than the average for the year previous at 1.3 rescues per incident.

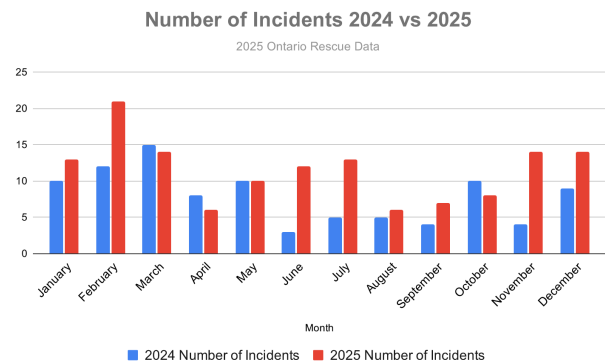


Figure 3 - Number of Incidents in 2024 vs 2025

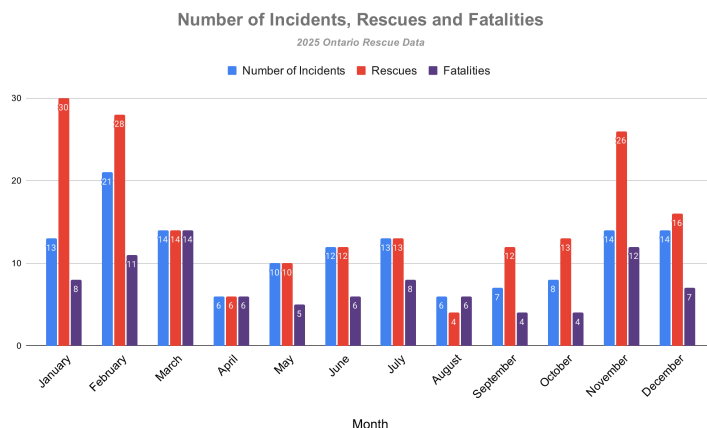


Figure 4 - Number of Incidents (blue) with Rescues (red) and Fatalities (purple) by month

Similar to the 2024 report, several factors can be at play in determining why winter months are seeing higher numbers of incidents, rescues and fatalities. Factors such as:

- Residents heating homes to keep warm;
- Winter weather causing longer response times;
- Drier air contributing to faster fire growth;
- More occupants being inside for the duration of the day because of colder weather; and,

- Holidays and additional hazards associated (real trees indoors, cooking, alcohol consumption, mental health and stress of season, etc).

Although these are all speculative and maybe correlative as opposed to causal factors for increases in winter months, it only further proves the point of required vigilance from fire service personnel when responding to fire incidents.

Time of Day

New for 2025 was the ability to timestamp incidents and examine possible trends based on time of day. News media and press briefings reporting on incidents sometimes included a very close approximation of the time of the incident. This can shed light on trends surrounding the time of day of an occurrence and can validate or disprove the often taught tactic of time of day indicating when people are home.

Times were broken down into three hour increments. There were a total of 123 incidents where time was able to be recorded. With this small sample size, there is an obvious higher number of incidents occurring late afternoon (figure 5a), however, with a spread of roughly 10%, it's proving that incidents can occur at all hours of the day.

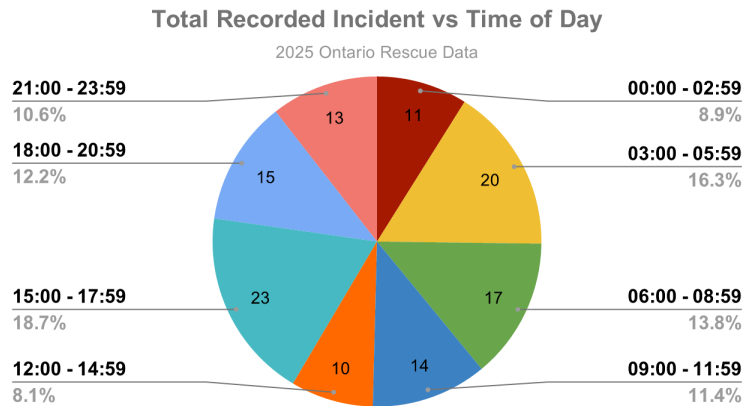


Figure 5a - Number of incidents versus time of day

Figure 5b examines solely the number of rescues that occurred within the same time blocks as figure 5a. The time block that had the highest number of rescues (27%) was between 09:00 and 12:00.

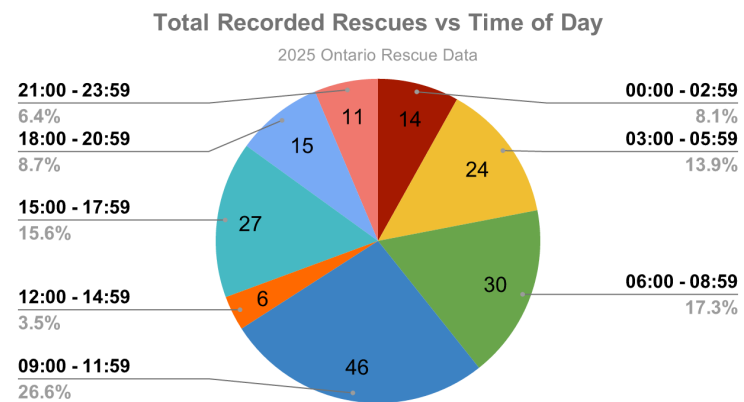


Figure 5b: Rescues vs Time of Day

Occupancy

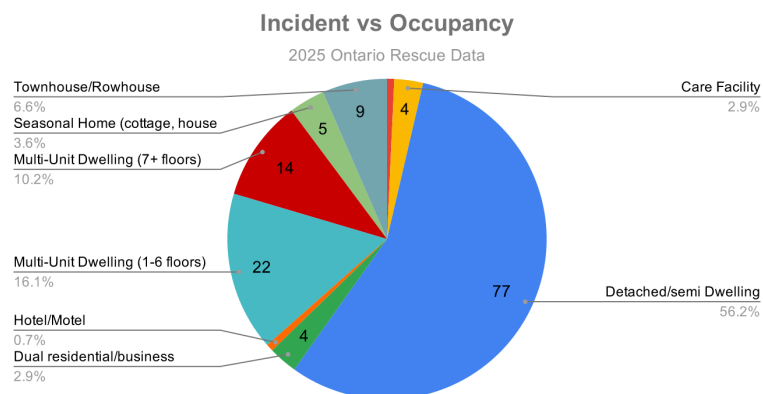


Figure 6 - Total number of incidents vs occupancy type

All occupancy categories for this study were closely aligned with the Ontario Building Code (OBC) classifications. (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2024).

Much like for 2024 and other similar data sources (OFM, FFRS) the majority of rescues and fatalities occur in residential structures, specifically detached residential structures at 56%.

Notably, there were incidents that occurred outside of typical residential occupancies that are worth sharing.

26% of the incidents occurred in multi-unit dwellings (examples would include apartment buildings). Three percent of incidents involving rescues and fatalities occurred in care and treatment facilities (nursing homes, long-term care, retirement homes, assisted living, etc.) this year (2025).

Encampments and occupancies that are not classified under the Ontario Building Code (OBC) were not considered for this study, although several fatalities occurred in 2025 involving this type of occupancy. Further examination will be conducted in 2026 to quantify how many fatalities are occurring and potentially explore what can be done to specifically mitigate this life safety hazard in the aforementioned occupancy type.

Removal Path

This year (2025) is the first attempt at obtaining information on the path of victim removal. Due to the limited information in public reporting, there were 81 rescues where the removal path was recorded.

Figure 7 reveals the number of victims removed based on the path in which they were removed. Even though the majority of victims were removed through a door, the other 47% can't be discounted. It can be

extrapolated that of these, a large percentage would have required the use of a ladder.

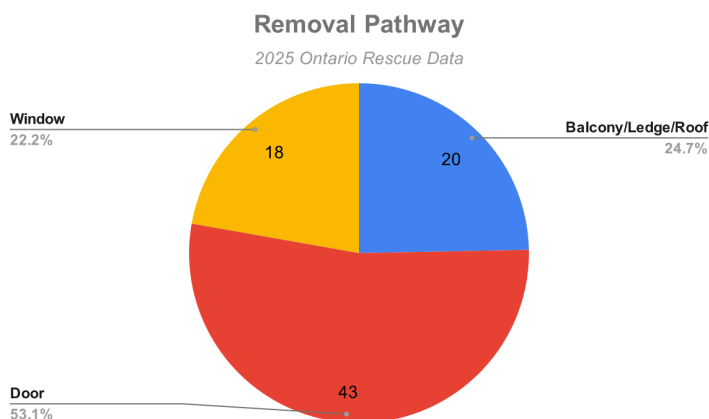


Figure 7 - Total number of rescues made via the removal path

Municipality

Similar to 2024 data, 2025 saw a wide distribution of municipalities with incidents. As expected, Toronto being the largest city in the province saw the largest percentage with 18% of the incidents, figure 8.

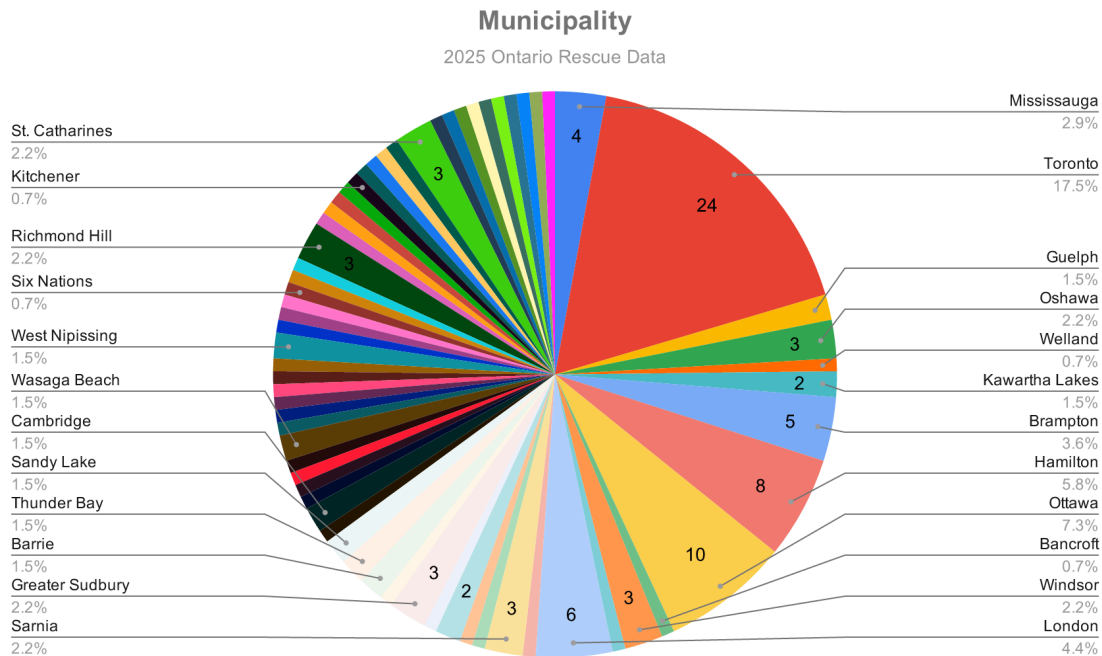


Figure 8 - Total number of incidents based on municipality

2025 saw new municipalities enter the database with incidents being recorded in Northern Ontario communities such as Sandy Lake, Foleyet, Kirkland Lake and Kenora.

Eastern Ontario also saw new incident locations including Hawkesbury, South Glengarry, Pembroke and Renfrew. Southern Ontario departments such as West Elgin, Lakeshore and LaSalle have also been captured in this report.

New for 2025 was the addition of plotting incidents on a map for readers and followers to see areas with incidents (Figures 1a and 1b). This is a critically important learning tool for firefighters to understand the depth and grasp this project has throughout the Province.

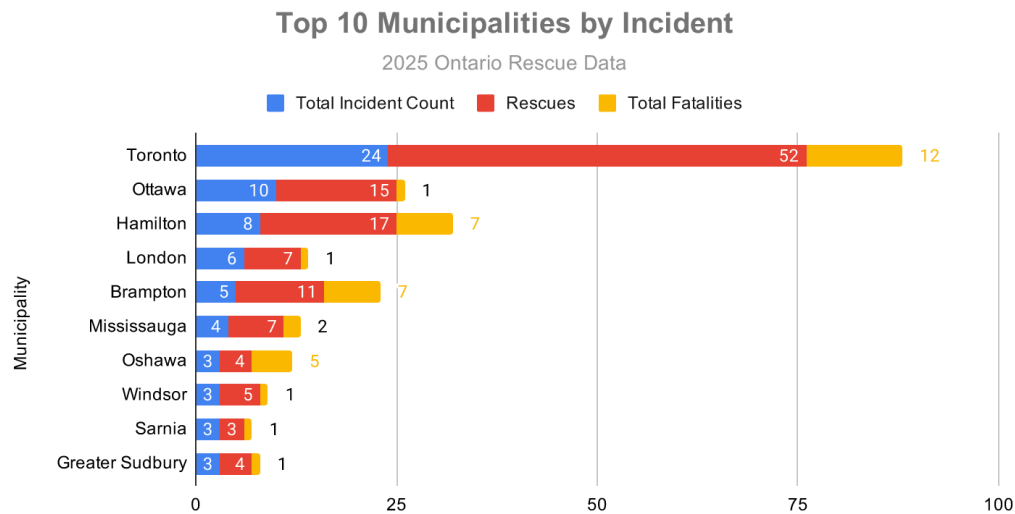


Figure 9 - Top 10 municipalities based on their total incident count

Figure 9 shows the top ten municipalities based on their total number of incidents. In this Top 10, Oshawa was the only department to see more fatalities than rescues. This was due to them responding to three incidents all involving fatalities - one incident being a tragic triple fatal house fire in March.

Population Centres

Prior to 2011 Statistics Canada would refer to heavily populated areas as “urban” areas. From 2011 to the present day they have developed and have been using the term ‘population centres’ (POPCTR). Which are classified into three groups:

- 1) Small POPCTR have a population between 1,000 and 29,999
- 2) Medium POPCTR have a population between 30,000 and 99,999
- 3) Large POPCTR have a population of 100,000 or more.

The areas with a population below 1,000 are considered rural areas. Together, these population centres and rural areas cover all of Canada.

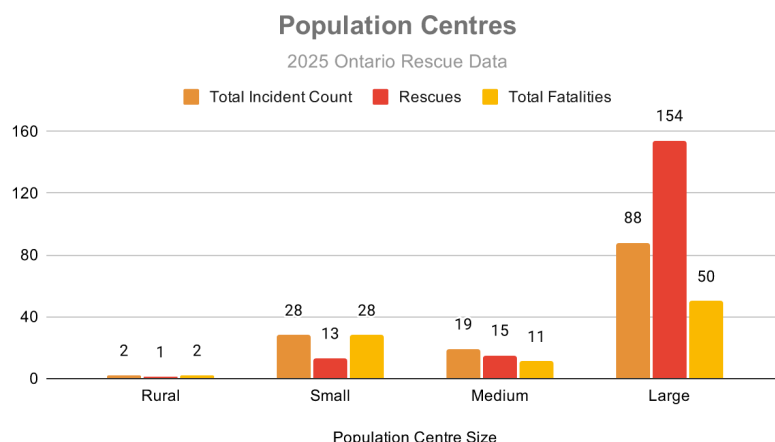


Figure 10 separates total incident counts, total recorded rescues and total number of fatalities based on what population centre the municipality falls under.

It is natural to expect that the more populous areas will have more incidents, which leads to more rescues and fatalities, however, it is

Figure 10 - Total number of incidents, rescues and fatalities versus population centres

also evident that rescues can occur in all areas.

Rescues Per Incident

When examining all incidents, an average of 1.67 people were rescued per incident in 2025. These incidents account for anytime a person was inside the fire building when the fire department arrived. Also of importance, is that of all the incidents where a rescue was made, 41% of them involved the rescuing of more than one person. Figure 11 details the spread of all rescue incidents and number of rescues made. Of note is the one incident in Toronto where 12 rescues were made in a high rise building.

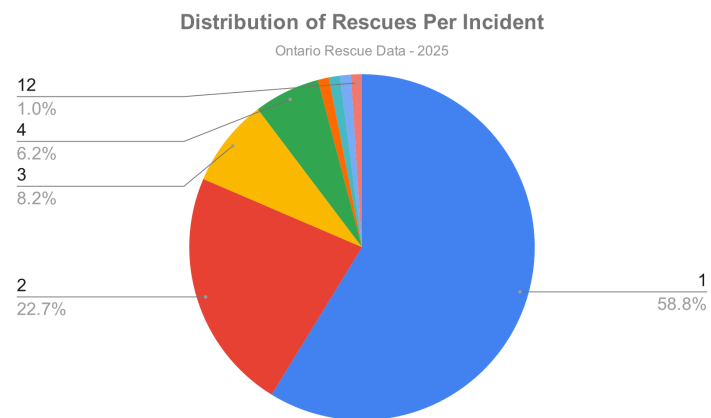


Figure 11 - Number of rescues that occurred in an incident.

Civilian Rescues

2025 saw several notable incidents involving civilians assisting in rescues. A total of fifteen people were assisted in being removed by non-fire department personnel. These civilian rescues range from neighbours, passerby's, police officers, delivery drivers and service workers on site. Although not the primary focus of this paper, it is important to mention these civilians that took substantial risk to assist in removing strangers from dangerous and hostile situations.

Discussion

Increased Number of Incidents

In 2024, a total of 94 incidents involving a rescue or fatality were captured. (De Benedictis, 2025) In 2025 the number of incidents increased by 46%. Why?

Options that can be considered in 2025 are explored below:

- Increased capability of screening incidents using daily Google alerts;
- Increased awareness in the network of firefighters in Ontario from social media presence;
- Increased network and contacts in other industries that can share news of incidents much more easily;
- Broader understanding of what defines a rescue; and,
- Greater number of actual incidents.

Time of Day

Some fire service and public education campaigns drive the message that a majority of fire fatalities occur at night. (Minister of the Solicitor General - Office of the Fire Marshal, 2025) Although more fatal fires may occur during the overnight hours, it is important to remember that incidents involving rescue and fatality happen 24 hours of the day. Figure 5b highlights the importance of being response ready at all hours of the day, with peak rescues occurring in the morning (06:00 - 11:59) This data will be further explored into 2026 for further analysis to determine if there is a trend or possible explanation of why this time results in significantly more rescues than other hours.

Training by Occupancy

56% of incidents involving rescues and fatalities occurred in detached residential homes. Does your department have a residential fire playbook? Look to the Fire Safety Research Institute (FSRI) for guidelines and best practices at formulating a playbook. (UL FSRI, 2025) Although these incidents can obviously vary in magnitude and complexity, residential homes are more similar than different. Fighting fire in the standard residential home in Ontario should be a bread and butter operation that all municipal fire departments should master. This is equivalent to a Formula 1 driver racing on their home track or a football team with home field advantage. Work done by Jordan Legan titled "Wayfinding in Smoke", highlights commonalities in architecture and building construction to standardize floor plans and how firefighters can leverage this knowledge to enhance their movement throughout these buildings. (Legan, 2022)

As stated previously, 2025 saw an increase in the number of incidents involving high risk occupancies. Care homes, nursing homes, hospitals, etc. are all categorized as high risk for the purposes of this study. Fire department members may exhibit some degree of complacency in these occupancies because of the potential robustness in protection and staffing within these buildings. However, four incidents with ten rescues and at least two fatalities occurred in the Province last year in these buildings. It is encouraged that firefighters get familiar with these buildings and pre-plan them to remain vigilant.

Multi-unit occupancies - which are segregated by number of floors or whether it was a townhouse/rowhouse for the purposes of this study - saw roughly 32% of all incidents in 2025. These buildings can create significant challenges for fire suppression, rescue profiles and resource allocation. It would be expected due to their size, the large metropolitan departments such as Toronto, Ottawa, Mississauga, Hamilton and Brampton would have more resources and equipment available to handle these potentially larger scale fires. However, these types of buildings, especially the low- and mid-rises are popping up in many municipalities across the Province. With 45% of the incidents in these buildings having multiple victims found during the same incident, departments need to exercise preparation for search, rescue, evacuation and patient care in these larger-scale operations. Several rescues and fatalities that occurred in 2025 were a result of occupants who were attempting to self-rescue and were overcome by smoke in areas such as hallways and stairwells. Public education messaging in these buildings is unclear and nuisance alarms can create occupant complacency.

Removal Method

With slightly under half of the recorded rescues happening from an elevated position (Figure 7), it is imperative that firefighters remain proficient in not only aerial and ground ladder operations, but also victim removal from these locations. One of the basic firefighter skills that each new firefighter is evaluated on is conscious and unconscious victim removal from a ladder, yet how many times is this skill practiced throughout their career and with realistic parameters of victim weight, height and location? This rescue removal data provides an important picture as to the depth of skills that firefighters are required to have beyond basic testing and evaluation.

Rescues Per Incident

With an average of 1.6 rescues per incident in 2024 and 2025, it is clear that fire departments in Ontario need to be both operationally and mentally prepared to expect multiple victims. An important piece to remember with this average number per incident is that it does **not** account for victims that may have already self-evacuated or did not require Fire Department intervention, yet may have still been treated by first responders or taken to hospital for care or treatment.

Another component that was not able to be examined in this category was severity of injuries. For example, one victim that was removed VSA (vital signs absent) can still require significant resources to treat, care and transfer. It's not always large multi-casualty incidents that require significant resource demands.

A consideration from this number, is that because one victim is found it should not be discounted that there are no other victims in the vicinity or building. Always do thorough searches and check for more victims. Individuals reading this report who have some form of influence for how departments operate or can arrange agreements with allied response agencies, such as paramedics, need to ensure that there are sufficient resources on scene to search for, remove and care for the potential of multiple victims during one incident.

Rescue and Survival

For the purposes of this study, not all rescues mean survival. This was briefly addressed in the limitations section and does require further explanation. When a report is captured of a victim being removed by fire service personnel, it is logged as a rescue. If it is also reported that the victim is pronounced deceased (either immediately on scene, after resuscitation efforts, or later in hospital) it is also logged as a fatality in a separate column. The rescue category is strictly accounting for a removal and not necessarily victim outcome. In the words of Chief Brian Brush - "Outcome is in God's hands" (FireNuggets, 2025)

With that in mind and based on the sometimes limited information from media articles, there were a total of 183 recorded rescues. Of those, 137 people survived due to the actions taken by the firefighters to remove them from the fire and smoke hazard. In other words, of the total incidents where occupants were impacted by fire, 60% of them lived when they may have otherwise become a fatality. This is a testament to the great work firefighters do everyday,

however equally as important, is arming themselves with data, knowledge and quality training for continual self-improvement.

It is a firm belief by the research group that no occupant should be assumed absent or deceased until proven otherwise by firefighters or higher medical authority. Thus, all actions by firefighters shall act in accordance with upholding this mindset. This means that they obtain as much information as they can, train regularly and base their decisions on what will be best for the unprotected civilian that is still inside the burning building.

To wrap up this portion of the discussion, if the term removal is substituted in place of rescue, it can suggest removals post-incident or recoveries after the fact. It is simply not acceptable to normalize or frame all rescues as removals in a negative connotation.

At-Bats and Survivals

Much like pre-hospital resuscitation, it is important that we begin to gather our statistics on wins and losses to properly evaluate operational and tactical effectiveness. Although it is known that this number is not 100% accurate, it is important that we begin to frame our actions this way and formulate best practices. Looking at the data, the survival rate for civilians that were directly removed from an interior hazardous environment in 2025 was 60%. This is an extremely significant finding in determining our effectiveness at life safety preservation.

Research on out-of-hospital cardiac arrests in Canada and Ontario suggest that the survival rates average less than 10%, and a 38% survival rate of those who are admitted to hospital (C-SCAN Investigators et al., 2025). Although the dataset included in this report is far less robust than the data from hospital cardiac arrests, it can be a good initial benchmark to capture our success.

Think of how much goes into a “standard” cardiac arrest call in every municipality. Staffing, education, training, response resources, the list goes on. The system runs smoothly and operates with the best of intent for survival (which is much lower than survival rates from fire). Yet how many municipalities commit to response, staffing, education, training, etc. for victim survival from fire? Furthermore, think of the operational improvements in out of hospital cardiac arrest in recent decades. The ability to evolve practice from what was previously taught or understood in resuscitation to modern day high-performance CPR has significantly improved survival outcomes.

Conclusion

This study has been able to draw several key findings to light that will enhance fire operations in the Province. Although this research has limitations, there is growing evidence showing the continued effort and dedication that Firefighters display on a regular basis in Ontario. 3.5 rescues per week with a survival rate of 60% occurring at all hours of the day and all months of the year. Big municipalities, small rural towns. No one is immune to the hazards fires poses.

Use the information contained within this report to enhance you or your fire department's:

- Operational readiness and performance
- Training
- Staffing levels
- Standard operating policies or guidelines

If you have been involved in a rescue or fatality from fire in Ontario, Reach out to the team and complete a survey! This submission will help with future data collection and analysis to better inform how we practice.



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