Hydrants: What's in a color? Information!

Fire hydrants are one of those things that just blend into the background of daily life. You probably drive past hundreds of them every day without seeing a single one. They are a simple fact of life in Brentwood; the grass is green, the sky is blue and there's a red fire hydrant on nearly every corner. If you've ever really taken a look at the fire hydrants, however, you'll notice that they aren't *completely* red. In fact, some hydrants don't have any red on them at all!

So why all the different colors? Why not just good old fashioned red and be done with it? Each color on a fire hydrant tells firefighters important information about that hydrant. The color on the bonnet, or top of the hydrant, lets firefighters know how much water that hydrant is capable of providing them. There's nothing to look up, no manual to consult and no computer searching required. In the dark, during a snowstorm, in the pouring rain or on a sunny day firefighters will be able take immediate action based on the available water supply.

A fire hydrant with a red bonnet signifies that it is known to flow up to 499 gallons per minute (gpm). All fire hydrants are red when they are first installed, and then Brentwood Fire and Rescue will test the flow of a new hydrant to determine how much water it is capable of producing. Once this number is known, the bonnet is painted the appropriate color. Brentwood is very fortunate to have a strong water system distributed through a carefully planned and well-designed infrastructure.

The color on the barrel, or body, of the hydrant lets the firefighters know whether the hydrant is part of the public water system or if it is a private hydrant. Private hydrants are ones where the water used is billed to the property owner the hydrant sits on, typically a church or business. These hydrants are yellow. If the hydrant barrel is red that means the water is city water, and the city is responsible for any costs associated with flowing that water. During an emergency firefighters will always utilize the nearest appropriate hydrant regardless of ownership, but after the emergency is mitigated there may be some sorting out of the billing required. After all, it wouldn't be fair to expect a business to pay for the water used to fight a fire on someone else's property. Ten gallons of water is one thing, but at a large fire there may be millions of gallons used to extinguish a well-entrenched blaze.

The orange bonnet on this hydrant means that it is capable of producing anywhere from 500 gpm to 999 gpm. The yellow barrel of the hydrant signifies that it is a private hydrant. Every year firefighters visit each hydrant to inspect it. This inspection process includes operating the hydrant to ensure that it functions properly and doesn't leak. Additionally firefighters will paint the hydrant to keep it looking nice. Brentwood Fire and Rescue has recently contracted with a company to have several of the city's oldest hydrants sandblasted. After years of painting there is a thick layer accumulated which prevents the hydrants from looking their best. After a visit from the sandblasting crew this hydrant will get a fresh coat of yellow and orange paint and look like new again!

This hydrant was recently sandblasted and treated to a fresh coat of paint. The green bonnet tells firefighters that they can expect between 1,000 and 1,499 gpm if they connect to this hydrant. The gauges attached to this hydrant are part of the hydrant testing process. Firefighters will test the water pressure under various conditions before utilizing a mathematical formula to determine the flow rate of the hydrant.

A hydrant with a blue bonnet is a firefighter's best friend when they need water. This hydrant is rated for the highest possible flow rate, which is in excess of 1,500 gpm. As was mentioned earlier, Brentwood has a strong water system, so flows greater than 2,000 gpm are not uncommon. In true firefighter fashion, these hydrants are often referred to as being 'hot'. A hot hydrant is quite desirable on the fireground. Here you can see Brentwood Fire and Rescue Engine 3 connected to the hydrant by its front intake, ready to open the hydrant and receive water. Blue topped hydrants are the most common in Brentwood. In fact, they are so common that many neighborhoods don't have any other colored hydrants at all.

The next time you find yourself stopped at a traffic light, take a quick look around. You'll probably see a fire hydrant nearby. You'll also be able to impress your neighbors by telling them how much water that hydrant down the street is capable of producing. If you see your local fire engine out checking hydrants, be sure to say hello!