

Tom O’Connor

Special Operations Division Chief | Vancouver Fire Department

Vancouver, Washington

Chief Tom O’Connor is a 33-year veteran of the fire service and currently serves as the Special Operations Division Chief for the Vancouver Fire Department in Washington State. In this role, he oversees the department’s fireboat operations and shipboard firefighting programs, bringing extensive experience in maritime emergency response, specialized operations, and regional preparedness.

Chief O’Connor holds several prominent leadership positions within the maritime response community. He serves as Chair of the Maritime Fire Safety Association’s regional shipboard firefighting consortium, which provides advanced training and strengthens response capabilities for a dozen fire departments supporting deep water ports and commercial vessel operations along more than 100 miles of the Lower Columbia and Willamette Rivers. He also serves as Vice President of the Portland/Vancouver Area River Safety Task Force, a collaborative partnership of fire services, law enforcement, and U.S. Coast Guard response vessel programs.

A dedicated instructor and advocate for maritime emergency preparedness, Chief O’Connor is the lead instructor and facilitator of the annual Maritime Incident Command School in Portland, Oregon. He also serves as a member of the instructor cadre for the Port of Virginia’s Marine Firefighting Command School.

Chief O’Connor earned an Executive Master of Public Administration from the University of Washington and holds a Certificate in Maritime Fire Safety from Lloyd’s Maritime

Academy. His professional qualifications include All-Hazards Incident Commander, Fire Officer IV, and licensed Paramedic.

Prior to his fire service career, Chief O'Connor served in the United States Coast Guard, including assignments aboard a polar-class icebreaker deployed to Antarctica as part of a damage control team and as a motor lifeboat pilot along the Oregon Coast. His combined military and civilian experience provides a unique perspective on maritime incident management, interagency coordination, and operational readiness.