Goshen Fire Prevention Officer (FPO) Mike Hoffman announces a great new program being offered to the residents and business owners within the Goshen Fire District.

Residents and business owners can now advise first responders of any situation where an occupant has a special need that could hinder their safe evacuation in an emergency. In situations where the individual may be at risk, it is vital that our firefighters be able to identify that the person has a special need, said Hoffman.

Last year members of the Goshen Fire Prevention Team expressed an interest in identifying individuals within the fire district that are Autistic and may need special attention in an emergency. Member Brian Gallo was able to obtain “Autism Window Stickers” which the Goshen Fire Department purchased. These stickers have been and will continue to be given to any residence and business that advise they have an occupant with Autism. Our Firefighters will be more equipped to rescue these individuals and ensure their safety and deal with the emergency in the most successful way, said Hoffman.

FPO Hoffman has decided to expand the program in 2016 to include anyone with special needs that could hinder their safe evacuation in an emergency. Examples being, but not limited to, immobile, oxygen dependent, deaf, blind, unable to communicate or any other special need that could hinder their safe evacuation in an emergency.

If you live within the Goshen Fire District and are or have someone that is eligible for this program, email FPO Mike Hoffman at prevention@mail.goshennyfd.org. In the email include your full name, complete address and phone number. Also include the full name, gender and age of the person with the special needs and a brief description of their needs. FPO Hoffman will then forward the information to the Orange County Emergency Services Center and they will enter the information into their 911 computer database. In the event of an emergency call to 911 the Orange County 911 dispatchers will automatically have the crucial information you disclose and will be able to relay the special needs to first responders as they are dispatched. Our firefighters will now have the planning time to adjust their emergency response if needed, said Hoffman.

According to FPO Hoffman, Orange County 911 already has this technology in place. The Goshen Fire Department may be one of the first, if not the first Fire Department in Orange County to actively encourage their residents of all ages and business owners to participate in this program. We are always looking for ways to keep people safe in our community. Members of the Goshen Fire Department realize it is essential for first responders to understand Autism and those with special needs and be prepared to respond effectively and safely to situations that arise involving these individuals, said Hoffman.