



NAPA COUNTY VOLUNTEER FIRE CHIEFS

FILED

JUL 24 2012

Clerk of the Napa Superior Court

By: *C. B. [Signature]*
Deputy

<p>Napa County Volunteer Fire Chiefs 2012</p>	<p>July 20, 2012</p>
<p>Avery Brown Angwin</p>	<p>The Honorable Diane Price Presiding Judge</p>
<p>Byron Madole Capell Valley</p>	<p>Superior Court of California, County of Napa 825 Brown St Napa, CA 94559</p>
<p>David Nye Carneros</p>	<p>Dear Judge Price:</p>
<p>Rod Sterling Deer Park</p>	<p>As required by Penal Code Section 933(c), enclosed is the response by the (nine) Volunteer Fire Department Chiefs to the 2011-2012 Grand Jury Final Report on the Napa County Fire Department.</p>
<p>Larry Russell Dry Creek Lokoya</p>	<p>We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude and thank all that contribute to the protection of the citizens and visitors of Napa County. The structure of the Napa County Fire Department and the relationship of the cooperating agencies are complex. We honor the dedicated work accomplished by the members of the 2011-2012 Napa County Grand Jury and appreciate the opportunity to participate in this process.</p>
<p>Cindy Black Gordon Valley</p>	
<p>Mike Damonte Pope Valley</p>	
<p>Davie Pina Rutherford</p>	<p>Sincerely, <i>Douglas B. Christian</i></p>
<p>Doug Christian Soda Canyon</p>	<p>Douglas B. Christian, Chair Volunteer Fire Department Chiefs</p>

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JUL 20 2012

Napa Superior Court
Court Executive Office

Napa County Volunteer Fire Chiefs RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY FINDINGS June 2012

The 2011-2012 Grand Jury finds that:

Finding #3. Having the CAL FIRE 6 County Unit Chief who, at the same time, is also the NCFC creates a less than full time commitment and attention to Fire and Emergency services for Napa County and its taxpayers.

Response #1 The nine (9) volunteer fire department chiefs agree with the finding.

The 2008 Grand Jury report determined a similar need for a dedicated Napa County Employee to coordinate, focus and support the NCFD Volunteer members of the NCFD. As described in the 2008 response (Recommendation #2), a position was created and filled by a CAL FIRE employee. Unfortunately, this model has not resulted in meeting the intended goals. Lack of coordination, focus and support is also identified in the current GJR and addressed not only the volunteer firefighter contingency, but the NCFD as a whole. We strongly believe that cultural differences exist between the career members (union CAL FIRE employees), and the volunteer members of NCFD. CAL FIRE staff focuses more on issues within the Lake/Napa/Sonoma Unit and the State, where the priority and commitment of the volunteer member is dedicated to their local community. These differences of vision and lack of a dedicated central position have not resulted in forward progress in the evolution of the NCFD. A dedicated Napa County employee whose allegiance is to the citizens and taxpayers of Napa County will enhance emergency services in Napa County.

Finding #5. If Napa County had a standalone Fire Department, without the CAL FIRE Agreement, Napa County residents could experience similar services as to what is now provided, at a significant savings to the County as demonstrated in Sonoma County.

Response #5 The nine (9) volunteer fire department chiefs partially agree with the finding.

- While the taxpayers of Napa County "could" receive similar services, the savings are unknown. To compare the Napa County and Sonoma County fire departments is difficult and the complexities are many. With the significant cost of the CALFIRE contract, a cost benefit analysis should be completed to determine if the Napa County taxpayers are receiving their best value.
- A dedicated Napa County Fire Department focused primarily on promoting emergency services in Napa County, rather than the Lake/Napa/Sonoma Unit and state, would enhance the services to our citizens.

Finding #6. There is a reasonable probability of saving a major part of the \$8,267,184 CAL FIRE contract budget if Napa County transitions CAL FIRE services to the NCFD.

Response #6 The nine (9) volunteer fire department chiefs partially agree with the finding.

Much of the Napa County lands are State Response Area (SRA). As explained by CALFIRE staff with regards to the November 2011 "Soda" Fire in the Loma Vista/Soda Canyon area, "The SRA Fire is the responsibility of CAL FIRE to mitigate, investigate, and provide explanations and helpful information to the affected citizens." NCFD is described as a cooperating agency. CAL FIRE is

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responsible for these areas whether they receive county funds or not. This also is a complex issue as other non-fire related emergency services are included in the current contract. A cost benefit analysis should be to be completed to determine the value of the contract.

Finding #12. CAL FIRE has made decisions which are self serving to CAL FIRE and not in the best interest of Napa County.

Response #12 The nine (9) volunteer fire department chiefs agree with the finding.

- It appears that the trend by CALFIRE is an effort to minimize or diminish volunteer response by reducing volunteer response areas, changing of dispatch models and “mandating” excessive training requirements so that volunteers are not allowed to, or have a limited opportunity to respond to emergencies. These changes have underutilized the volunteer resources and could have a negative impact on the citizens and visitors of Napa County. These changes also support an argument that today’s volunteer responses are diminishing, thus the need for an increased CALFIRE role.
- When cover assignments are needed, or equipment for hire is requested, in lieu of staffing county fire apparatus with NCFD volunteers as was past practice, County equipment is typically now staffed with CALFIRE employees.
- The purchase of the most effective types of emergency vehicles for some of the more remote, unique areas in Napa County have not been supported, unless pressured by an outside influence (Patrol units by the 2008 GJR). The CALFIRE/NCFD staff usually support the purchases of apparatus that blend into the state mutual aid system in which CALFIRE plays a significant role. These are not always the best vehicles for Napa County, but certainly support the CALFIRE response capability.
- County training staff have been utilized for state purposes, whether it is training state employees (often times the seasonal state firefighters), or used on state incidents. This affects NCFD training and NCFD. A recent example was a NCFD training staff member cancelled required training due to playing a role in the February 2012 Soda fire. One of many others could have filled the role at the fire, but the choice was made to cancel NCFD training, and the county funded employee to remain on the SRA fire.

Finding #14. The Volunteer Departments in Napa County are very cost effective providers of Fire/EMS services.

Response #14 The nine (9) volunteer fire department chiefs agree with the finding.

- The Napa County Volunteer Fire Departments are cost effective providers of emergency services if supported and managed. Volunteer emergency resources could have an increased role in the delivery of emergency services and provide a quality service to the citizens and visitors of Napa County.
- Volunteers can perform station coverage, or backfill in their response areas, when large emergency events deplete career staff.

Finding #15. In Napa County, CAL FIRE has discouraged the use of volunteers.

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Response #15 The nine (9) volunteer fire department chiefs agree with the finding.

- The use of volunteer stations for local coverage assignments has decreased, thus underutilizing these valuable resources.
- Recent CAD (computer aided dispatch) reprogramming changes have shown that some volunteer departments are not dispatched to incidents in their response areas. As a result, the closest emergency resource is not always sent to the incident, thus delaying intervention. For medical incidents, which are 80-90% of the emergency responses, volunteers will often respond in their personal vehicles. CAD does not seem to recognize this type of response, assuming that all responses will be by a fire apparatus. This underutilizes the volunteers and could prevent quicker medical assistance.
- Some volunteers are certified fire instructors and many others are qualified to instruct. However, the training division prefers the use of a career station to instruct rather than using qualified volunteer instructors. The assistance provided from the career stations is appreciated, but the opportunity of the qualified volunteer instructor to provide quality training, to lead, to gain ownership of NCFD and to develop their management skills are lost.
- A change in initial volunteer firefighter training has taken place that often times greatly exceeds the number of training hours required by State and Federal laws. This has negatively effected recruitment and discouraged those wishing to be volunteer emergency responders in their communities.
- The NCFD training plan has focused more toward the volunteer seeking a future fire career rather than the volunteer seeking to provide safe, effective emergency response to their local community. This has significantly increased the number of hours required to respond to emergency events and reduced the ability of the volunteer departments to provide responders.

Finding #16. CAL FIRE has ignored volunteer chiefs' recommendations.

Response #16 The nine (9) volunteer fire department chiefs agree with the finding.

Page #15 of 2011-2012 GJR, a middle management correspondence with regards to volunteer chief opinions/recommendations, "...it seems incredible that the future organization of NCFD hangs on a decision made by individuals who work as a gardener, vintner, school teacher, fire extinguisher serviceman, etc." Unfortunately, this opinion is not isolated and seems to be held by some of the middle management and senior staff, and through their examples, has proven to have a negative systemic effect on NCFD.

While it is true that these four referenced individuals are not full time career fire employees, they provide valuable insight as embedded community members, bringing over 120 years of NCFD fire experience to the Advisory Board. The nine volunteer chiefs bring well over 200 years of experience. Important decisions in areas such as apparatus/equipment purchases, training requirements and response/dispatch models often times appear to be ignored. The process for soliciting recommendations lends itself to not utilizing suggestions of the chiefs. Rather than communicative and collaborative efforts, decisions are presented to the Advisory Board without feedback or an understanding of why a recommendation was not valued.

It is not expected that every recommendation from this group be implemented as we are simply an advisory group, but ignoring recommendations with no feedback implies no value to suggestions. Recommendations should be evaluated and feedback received.

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Finding #17. The NCFC does not sufficiently encourage volunteer recruitment.

Response #17 The nine (9) volunteer fire department chiefs partially agree with the finding.

- The volunteer academy schedule has little flexibility, and the training content is excessive. When compared to established Federal/State mandates, the required number of training hours is greatly exceeded and is increasingly burdensome. This not only discourages recruitment of volunteers, but also the ability to retain volunteer resources. A stipend program to reimburse volunteer members for participation is in place. However, the firefighter recruits that put in approximately 200 hrs of training over a 4 month period, not including travel times throughout the county, can have significant fuel costs and are not compensated. This can be a financial burden and discourages new prospective volunteers.
- In the past year, NCFD career and volunteer staff have worked to obtain a grant to assist with recruiting volunteer firefighters. Career staff has also been assisting volunteer staff with developing a recruitment flyer. These actions are appreciated and are steps in the right direction.

Finding #18. Some volunteer fire departments need outreach to their community, and their community needs to be directly involved with the Volunteer Fire Department boards and operations.

Response #18 The nine (9) volunteer fire department chiefs partially agree with the finding.

Some communities benefit from members being involved with the fire department boards. We support each department involving community members in roles that best serve their community. However, community boards are not viable for every department.

Finding #19. A balanced volunteer fire department governing Board of Directors should require a significant community representation.

Response #19 The nine (9) volunteer fire department chiefs partially agree with the finding.

Not all departments have a Board of Directors or community oversight council. However, community involvement should be encouraged at all levels of the local department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2011-2012 Grand Jury recommends that:

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Recommendation #1. Napa County write a job description and employ a NCFC who will be independent and separate from CAL FIRE employment, before contracting CAL FIRE services for the agreement year 2013-2014.

Response #1 While in agreement, the nine (9) volunteer chiefs have no authority to implement this recommendation.

A model of a CALFIRE employee in a similar position is currently in place. This position has not had the anticipated affect on NCFD. The volunteer chiefs strongly recommend that this position should be a Napa County employee wholly dedicated to the NCFD. See Finding #3 response.

Recommendation #2. The NCFC immediately and actively support the local Volunteer Fire Department Chiefs, their Advisory Board, and governing boards.

Response #2 While in agreement, the nine (9) volunteer chiefs have no authority to implement this recommendation.

Recommendation #3. The NCFC immediately and actively support recruitment of new firefighter volunteers.

Response #3 While in agreement, the nine (9) volunteer chiefs have no authority to implement this recommendation.

Recommendation #5. Replace CAL FIRE Dispatch services for Napa County Fire/EMS with the existing Napa Central Dispatch services which will not alter CAL FIRE dispatch of CAL FIRE units.

Response #5 The nine (9) volunteer chiefs have no authority to implement this recommendation. We believe further analysis is required.

Recommendation #6: Napa complete a CBA, by an independent firm, of all fire protection services provided by CAL FIRE and NCFD before contracting CAL FIRE services for the agreement year 2014-2015.

Response #6 While in agreement, the nine (9) volunteer chiefs have no authority to implement this recommendation.

Recommendation #7: Within three years, or on the schedule outlined by the CBA, implement the CBA recommendation regarding the CAL FIRE Agreement.

Response #7 The nine (9) volunteer chiefs have no authority to implement this recommendation. If the CBA determines a more cost effective way to provide similar emergency services, we should evaluate those recommendations to ensure that we provide the best value to the taxpayers.