

Joint Press Release

For Immediate Release March 20, 2009

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Loss of Funding Threatens Fire Protection Countywide

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors will be holding a special Board Meeting/Workshop on Monday, March 30, 2009, that will deal with El Dorado County's Fire and Emergency Medical Services funding. Several areas related to the Fire Service will be discussed at the workshop including Aid to Fire, the Teeter Program, consolidation of some or all fire service agencies, and funding issues that will affect the El Dorado County Emergency Operations Authority.

At a recent special Supervisors' meeting, El Dorado County's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) made a recommendation to the supervisors to severely cut funding to the county's fire districts. This could result in the loss of over \$1,000,000 to the fire districts in this county. Loss of this important funding will have a major impact on the ability of the fire districts to continue to provide the outstanding level of service that the residents and taxpayers of this county have come to expect.

To understand what impact the loss of Aid to Fire funding will have on the taxpayers of this county, it is first important to know why this funding was provided in the first place. In August of 2001, the county entered into a contract with the fire districts to provide supplemental funding to eight fire districts in the county that serve large, rural areas but whose tax base was lower than those of the other fire districts. This funding, now being called Aid to Fire, brought those fire districts to an equivalent tax rate allowing them to provide the same level of service as the other fire districts. These funds are for public safety and to ensure compliance with state health and safety codes and mandates.

These supplemental Aid to Fire funds have been used to purchase and maintain fire apparatus and personal protective equipment, to provide training, to support fire prevention and public education programs, to institute full-time Paramedic (ALS)-Engine Companies, to start apprentice-firefighter programs, to provide seasonal firefighter positions, to meet "matching" funds on several large grants, and to allow districts to participate in Statewide and Local Mutual Aid Requests.

At the time of the agreement, it was the county's desire to assist the districts in achieving long-term stability. It is only now that the CAO is requesting that this funding be rescinded as they prepare for a significant shortfall in revenue. It is now that they wish to abolish these funds even as the scope of services our fire districts provide is increasing. We are faced with an increase in population, an increase in the numbers, size and complexity of the homes being built and an increase in call volume. Fire districts not only deal with house fires and medical calls but now respond to hazardous material spills, rescues, vehicle accidents, and wildland fires. We respond to these calls within our own district borders as well as in other El Dorado County fire districts and even in parts of other counties. The level of skill, training, and administration of our districts has dramatically increased as mandated by ever increasing local, state, and federal standards.

Loss of this funding will affect each fire district in different ways but the entire county will feel the impact as the current levels of service become impossible to maintain. Some districts will be forced to lay off paid daytime staffing and rely on volunteers to respond to emergencies while others will have to close fire stations. Response times will go from 2 minutes to 15 minutes or longer. This could have serious "life or death" consequences. Fire districts will be forced to refuse any statewide mutual aid requests virtually making Mutual-Aid/Automatic Aid to neighboring fire agencies a thing of the past.

The position of the Fire Chiefs' Association and the Board of Directors of the El Dorado County Emergency Operations Authority is that the County has not met its obligation for public safety as it relates to Fire and Emergency Medical Services. Our mission is based on the idea of protecting life and property by maintaining a safe community. During this fiscal downturn, we should also keep in mind that a healthy Fire Service is a requirement of the County's General Plan and a necessity for sustaining all of our insurance rates. Poor fire protection equates to no development, no revenue, and individuals losing their affordable property insurance. In other words, without good fire protection, our communities in El Dorado County will have a loss of economic viability.

Please support your local fire district by attending the Workshop on March 30, 2009, at 9:00AM in the County Board of Supervisors' Chambers, 330 Fair Lane, Placerville, CA 95667 or by sending each Supervisor a letter or email in support of your local fire department.

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