



CONTRA COSTA COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

September 22, 2020

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Lewis T. Broschard III, Fire Chief

RE: Fire Chief's Report

- Remembering Our Fallen Firefighters. We continued our practice of honoring and remembering those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the communities we serve at our annual Fallen Firefighter Memorial Ceremony on Saturday, September 12. This year, due to COVID distancing precautions and poor air quality, the ceremony was live-streamed and held in our classroom at our administrative offices. Thanks to Chair Andersen for participating in our ceremony and honoring our fallen with her remarks. The ceremony can be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/contracostafire/live/>.
- Michele Drive Incident Thirteen Years Later. Our work to learn lessons from this incident that claimed two of our firefighter's lives in 2007 continues. Following up on our safety stand down during the anniversary week in July, we continue to review, refine, and implement improvements to procedures. Our progress on the original Michele Drive recommendations stands at 104 recommendations implemented out of the original 127.
- Fire Season Update. This year's fire season continues to prove challenging. We are continuing to experience unseasonably early fire risks ahead of the normal height of the annual fire season. Weather predictions indicate an extended fire season, perhaps into mid-November.

Dry lightning storms wreaked havoc in mid-August sparking countless fires across the state. In addition to dispatching numerous strike teams, made up of Con Fire and other operational area resources to Alameda, Napa, San Bernardino and Solano counties, we have also contributed our firefighting dozers, Crew 12, and numerous individual resources. As of this writing, we are still staffing strike teams on distant fires in northern and southern California.

As we move into the traditionally more wildfire-prone weeks of late September, October and early November, we expect fire frequency and danger to rise once again. Recent long-range weather forecast models suggest a late start to our area receiving consistent rains. Additionally, local fuel moisture levels (the quantity of water in trees and brush) have long been at the low levels normally not seen until October.

- Deer Complex Response. On Sunday, August 16, the District responded in support of the Deer Complex in east Contra Costa with 13 engines, multiple chief officers, both dozers, and our hand crew. Most were committed from the pre-dawn hours through the late evening or next morning for a total of more than 24 hours for some resources. As a result of the lightning event that occurred early that morning and throughout the day, we held all personnel from going off duty at morning shift change. All chief officers were recalled, the County EOC was supported, and our DOC was staffed until 7:00 p.m. that Sunday. Eleven dispatchers worked throughout the morning to handle multiple incidents and significant resource movement. These combined efforts resulted in us being able to staff all stations, even with the heavy commitment to the Deer Complex, until it could be confirmed that no additional fires were started as a result of the lightning event.

For the crews working on the Deer Complex, as well as our own incidents, they worked through excessive temperatures exceeding 107 degrees in oppressive and extreme firefighting conditions to assist in containing the fires. This brief report can in no way describe the effort put forth by our personnel on August 16 and throughout the following few days where multiple crews were sent to adjacent operational areas to assist in these unprecedented fire events. They performed excellent work and represented the very best of our organization.

- Fleet Updates. Several heavy equipment fleet additions are in the works. These are long-lead-time acquisitions with a new ladder truck and two Type 1 engines expected to be added late this year.
- Fire Prevention Bureau Update. As we move into the final quarter of the calendar year, our progress on state-mandated inspections is strong with some 98% of the more than 7,000 inspections already conducted. Apartments and multi-family residential occupancies, with the largest total number of inspections required, is at 99.5% completion with K-12 schools at 95% completion. One area of concern has been congregate living facilities where we have deferred some inspections to avoid exposing our employees to unnecessary infection risks. All categories of mandated inspections are on track for completion this year.

Similarly, weed abatement inspections are progressing well with inspections of priority risk areas being completed along with issuance of end stage work orders on non-compliant properties. Inspectors also evaluated conditions in open space areas adjacent to residential areas in August and September.

The Bureau's work to mitigate fire risks related to homeless encampments continued to progress as we worked with a variety of local partners in August and September to ensure the safety of these residents is not overlooked. We visited numerous encampments offering fire prevention guidance on implementing safety measures including fire suppression access and other risk reduction measures to the various agencies involved with them.

- COVID-19 Crisis Management. We continue to closely monitor both our crew and employee protection measures and issued a single, consolidated infection protection policy in August to simplify and clarify what had become a number of governing documents. We accompanied this new policy with considerable employee communications activity to ensure awareness, understanding, and compliance, including live webinars for each of our three shifts.

One new area of concern, as a result of numerous out-of-county deployments, is the unique risks these situations create. We took steps in late August to close gaps in our protection efforts and to encourage testing for returning crews.

Our protection measures continue to perform well, helping us hold the line on infections and protect our patients. We continue to monitor the evolving situation, especially infections and deaths in first responder organizations, and remain prepared to adapt as may become necessary.

Assistant Chief Quesada submitted an application for, and we received, a grant award from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant-Supplemental (AFGS) program, specifically pertaining to acquisition of or reimbursement for COVID related personal protective equipment (PPE). The grant award was \$100,000, and we are working through the procurement and reimbursement process.

- REACH Partnership. Con Air 1 went online with its new aerial fire suppression mission in August and was dispatched for the first time to a grassfire in Hercules on August 28. In this case, it did not become necessary to put water on that fire, but Con Air 1 was overhead and ready to do so. Hoist training will begin in October with the anticipation Con Air 1 will be certified and ready for these new rescue missions in November.

Both aircraft continue to operate in their air ambulance roles. The value of two air ambulance aircraft was proven again on September 7 when both were needed to respond to a major trauma injury accident on Highway 4 in Brentwood.

- Ambulance Transport Program. We continue to monitor 911 emergency ambulance transport volume in relation to our deployed unit hours. At the height of the COVID crisis, we were experiencing transport volumes as much as 28% below normal levels. Currently, transport and call volume numbers have risen to closer to normal levels for this time of year – approximately 90% of pre-pandemic levels. In spring, we had reduced deployed daily ambulance unit hours by approximately 10% to better match demand and deployment capacity while controlling costs. This was done without adverse employee impacts. As of September 1, we have directed our sub-contractor to increase ambulance unit hour deployment back to pre-COVID reduction levels as 911 call volume and ambulance transport appears to be returning to near-normal levels.
- Budget Update. We received the annual assessment letter from the County Assessor on August 10, and it reflected estimates that were in line with our original estimate of a five percent (5%) increase for assessed valuation growth within the

District for FY2020-21. We still plan to work through the current fiscal year in a reduced revenue mindset with regard to expenditures as was presented to the Board during the budget hearings on August 4.