



# **DIANNE JACOB**

**VICE CHAIRWOMAN  
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

## **AGENDA ITEM**

**DATE:** December 2, 2003

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT:** **TASK FORCE ON FIRE PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (District: All)**

### **SUMMARY:**

#### **Overview**

Despite San Diego County's vast size, population and economy, our fire protection system is a jigsaw puzzle of agencies that differ in size, structure, standards, service and funding. While the recent devastating wildland fires in San Diego County have placed a spotlight on our fire protection system, a cooperative effort to address inadequacies in fire service has been ongoing since 1999, when the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services was formed.

Today's action will provide the Board of Supervisors with a report on the efforts of the Task Force to improve fire services in San Diego County. In addition, today's action will support actions taken by the Task Force at the November 20, 2003 meeting.

#### **Recommendation(s)**

##### **VICE CHAIRWOMAN JACOB:**

1. Receive a report from the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services on efforts to improve fire services in San Diego County.
2. Support the following actions taken by the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services at the November 20, 2003 meeting:
  - A. Letter to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger requesting a year-round CDF helicopter in San Diego County and immediate funding of California Department of Corrections (CDC) positions to allow crew staffing at Camp La Cima.
  - B. Letter to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger requesting that the State repeal the SRA fees and restore CDF to full funding; forward letter to other counties for similar action.

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- C. Request that the County of San Diego, through the Office of Emergency Services, ensure the creation of community protection and evacuation plans, which would include:
  - Creation/maintenance of adequate access and areas of safe refuge
  - Fire breaks as appropriate
  - Community maps
  - Community notification plans
  - Evacuation plans
  - Resource pre-plans
- D. Consolidation of Fire Agencies within San Diego County - Regionalism Subcommittee to provide Task Force with a timeline, a preliminary paper version of a regional agency and funding options at January 23, 2004 Task Force meeting.
- E. Regional Aerial Firefighting Fleet - Support recommendation of the San Diego County Fire Chiefs' Association.
- F. Request that San Diego County develop standards for clearance and for management of open space in the unincorporated area, to include roadways, access, fire resistive construction; standards will constitute countywide minimums and shall be enforced.
- G. Investigate and return with recommendations regarding CEQA and other constraints on vegetation management.
- H. Support necessary enhancements to the Regional Communications System; in particular the Task Force supports upgrading the East Intelli-repeater to full simulcast; and support recommendation to improve interoperability between local, state and federal agencies.
- I. Request that the San Diego County Fire Chief's Association review the current state-wide mutual aid agreement and provide any recommended changes.

**Fiscal Impact**

There is no fiscal impact associated with these actions.

**BACKGROUND:**

In June of 1997, the San Diego Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) assigned a high priority to studying the potential for consolidating fire protection services in San Diego County, and conducted an extensive survey among numerous fire protection agencies. After reviewing the survey results in May of 1998, the Commission initiated a study of all issues impacting fire protection service funding. LAFCO approved the report, Funding Fire Protection, in February 1999. Following the release of the report, the Commission established the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical

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Services, with the mission of improving regional fire protection and emergency medical services in San Diego County through cooperative efforts, legislative action, public education and critical examination of existing and potential service delivery.

Despite San Diego County's vast size, population and economy, our fire protection system is a jigsaw puzzle of agencies that differ in size, structure, standards, service and funding. While the recent devastating wildland fires in San Diego County have placed a spotlight on our fire protection system, a cooperative effort to address inadequacies in fire service has been ongoing since the formation of the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services.

**CDF Resources and Funding**

Through a funding augmentation by the State, a CDF contract helicopter has been stationed in San Diego since the start of the fire season. The contract for this helicopter is expected to end on December 15, 2003. Immediate action is needed by the State to ensure that the CDF helicopter doesn't leave San Diego County and that it permanently remains here on a year-round basis.

Funding for Camp La Cima was cut by the State in the California Conservation Corps' (CCC) budget earlier this year. While CDF runs the fire camp, CCC was providing the staff for the work crews. It has been proposed that inmate work crews from the California Department of Corrections (CDC) could take the place of CCC members. Immediate funding of CDC positions is needed so that a full compliment of work crews may be housed at Camp La Cima.

Earlier this year, the State passed a budget that included a \$52.5 million cut in funding to CDF. Even worse, the State approved a \$35 per parcel fee on residents in the State Responsibility Area (SRA) to offset the cut in CDF funding. Not only do property owners already pay for CDF fire protection through various taxes, most of the victims of the recent fires will be charged this fee for fire protection. This is wrong! The SRA fee needs to be repealed and the \$52.5 million in funding needs to be restored.

**Community Protection and Evacuation Plans**

One of the most common concerns voiced in days following the start of the Cedar Fire was the level of notification provided and the evacuation procedures that were in place. Since each community in the unincorporated area is unique, individual community protection and evacuation plans are needed to make sure that adequate procedures are in place for notification and evacuation.

**Consolidation of Fire Agencies within San Diego County**

In April of 2002, the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services took action to initiate a "Municipal Services Review" of the fire protection agencies in San Diego County. The Municipal Services Review is the first legal step towards

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consolidation of fire services. Subsequent to this, LAFCO authorized the Municipal Services Review and work began at the end of 2002. Phase one of the review focuses on unincorporated fire agencies and will be completed this month. Phase two focuses on the rest of the region and will be completed early next year. At the January 23, 2004 meeting of the Task Force, the Regionalism Subcommittee will provide the Task Force with a timeline, a preliminary paper version of a regional agency and funding options.

**Regional Aerial Fire Fighting Fleet**

On November 7, 2003 the San Diego County Fire Chiefs' Association sent a letter to Chairman Greg Cox and the other members of the Board of Supervisors regarding a regional fire/rescue helicopter program. The Association stated that the best approach to a responsible regional program is to utilize a professional consultant to conduct a study to fully examine the helicopter firefighting requirements in the County, provide guidance on the level of protection we should have, and propose a course to achieve that protection, including funding. At the November 20, 2003 meeting, the Task Force on Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services took a position in support of the recommendation from the Fire Chiefs' Association.

**Vegetation Management**

At the November 20, 2003 meeting, the Task Force took action to request that San Diego County develop standards for clearance and for management of open space in the unincorporated area, and investigate and return with recommendations regarding CEQA and other constraints on vegetation management. These issues are included in Item 2 on the December 2, 2003 meeting of the Board of Supervisors – Protecting Lives And Property From Fire In The Unincorporated Area. Reasonable, common sense approaches to protect lives and property will be the driving force behind changes to fuel management, access, defensive land use design, brushing and clearing, and building codes.

**Communications/Coordination**

Public safety officials were hampered like never before as they attempted to communicate during the Cedar, Paradise and Otay fires, only to repeatedly get busy signals on their radio. During the wildland fires in October, there were 34,798 busy signals on the South loop. Even worse, the East loop experienced a staggering 64,520 busy signals. The County and other members of the Regional Communications System can't wait until the next disaster before action is taken to enhance the capacity of the system. At the November 20, 2003 meeting, the Task Force took action to support necessary enhancements to the Regional Communications System, and support improved interoperability between local, state and federal agencies.

**Mutual Aid**

Despite the red flag warning for weekend of October 24-26 and the severe fire conditions that exist in San Diego County, a significant number of fire resources were out of the region, fighting other blazes in the State. In an effort to address the concerns over a lack

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of firefighting resources in the County at the start of the Cedar fire, the Task Force took action to request that the San Diego County Fire Chiefs' Association review the current statewide mutual aid agreement and provide any recommended changes.

Today's action will provide the Board of Supervisors with a report on the efforts of the Task Force to improve fire services in San Diego County. In addition, today's action will support actions taken by the Task Force at the November 20, 2003 meeting. I urge your support.

Respectfully submitted,

DIANNE JACOB  
Vice Chairwoman  
Supervisor, Second District