

2007-2008 GRAND JURY REPORT

Idyllwild Fire Protection District

Background

The Idyllwild Fire Protection District (IFPD) was formed in 1946 and the volunteer fire department was created the same year. The fire district and volunteer department were formed to provide fire protection to a populated unincorporated mountain community in Riverside County. The following year a fire chief was hired as the only paid full-time fire department employee. In 1960 the fire department hired three full-time paid firefighter/engineers in order to have a qualified driver for the engine available at all times. The fire department continued to expand until, at present, there are six full-time paid firefighter/paramedics, hereinafter referred to as "career firefighters", three limited term firefighters, and a fire chief.

The fire department also provides ambulance service for Idyllwild, County Service Area (CSA) 38-Pine Cove, and surrounding mountain areas adjacent to Idyllwild.

The fire department currently has the following manpower configuration:

- Fire Chief;
- Six Career Firefighter/Paramedics (*Includes four Captains*);
- Three Limited Term Firefighters;
- Twelve Paid Call Firefighters/Paramedics (*Paid only for the time served*);
- Ten Reserve Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), EMT/Firefighters, Paramedics, Paramedic/Firefighters;

The fire department currently has the following equipment, which is housed at the fire department station located in Idyllwild.

- One Engine – Class One:
 - A New Engine – Class One (*on order*);
- One Ladder Truck;
- One Brush Engine – Class Three;
- One Brush Engine – Class Three (*older piece of equipment*):
 - This is to be returned to the U.S. Forest Service or sold;
- Three Ambulances:
 - Two Advanced Life Support (ALS) equipped;
 - One Basic Life Support (BLS) equipped (can be quickly converted to ALS);
- Two Pickup Trucks – Four-wheel drive.

The IFPD is funded through an annual assessment of all properties within the IFPD boundaries. IFPD also receives funding from Riverside County Emergency Medical Services (EMS), state aid, and charges for services, grants, and other miscellaneous revenues. The IFPD's total receipts/revenues for fiscal year 2006-2007 was \$1,483,712 with total expenditures of \$1,385,345. Their 2007-2008 budget for receipts/revenues is \$1,496,700 with planned expenditures of \$1,529,100.

A Board consisting of five elected Fire District Commissioners governs the IFPD. The Board meets once a month. The meetings are held at the Idyllwild Fire Station, are open to the public, and have an agenda posted 72-hours in advance.

Findings

1. On October 10, 2006, an incident occurred regarding a sick child at the Idyllwild School (K-8). After calling '911', the school could not produce the current school year parental consent form. The school requested the sick child be transported to a hospital by Idyllwild Fire Department ambulance and paramedics.

2. Idyllwild Fire Department paramedics responded to a '911' call concerning the sick child at the Idyllwild School. Paramedics refused to transport the child to the hospital, as requested by the school principal who was in contact with the Hemet Unified School District nurse. The decision not to transport was made by paramedics without contacting an approved base or receiving hospital. Riverside County EMS Policy 5500 requires contact with a hospital base station before field personnel can clear a call. A written memorandum from EMS dated July 17, 2007, to paramedic provider agencies and hospitals regarding 'medical clearance' of patients in the field, further enforces this policy.
3. A scheduled meeting between the principal of the Idyllwild School, members of the Hemet Unified School District, and the Fire Chief for the Idyllwild Fire Department concerning the transporting of a sick child has not yet taken place. Several meetings were scheduled, however, for various reasons these meetings were cancelled by the Fire Chief, and not rescheduled by him.
4. The Grand Jury has determined, through a series of interviews, that members of the fire department and commission have attempted various forms of intimidation. The attempted intimidation occurred against individuals who spoke out against the department, department policy, or certain members of the fire department.

The following examples were obtained during sworn testimony:

- Members of the public have expressed that they felt intimidated at the Fire Commission Meetings due to the number of uniformed fire department personnel in attendance at a given meeting. Fire department personnel also made intimidating statements to attendees during and after the meeting.
 - Members of the public have stated they felt intimidated by fire department vehicles repeatedly parking in front or near their homes or businesses for long periods of time and for no apparent reason.
 - A business owner has testified that he felt threatened regarding actions taken over an on-going easement issue with the fire department, concerning access by fire apparatus.
5. The Idyllwild Fire Department has conducted practice burns without first obtaining a 'burn control number' from the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD). This constitutes a violation of AQMD Rule 444, amended December 21, 2001. They also burned a vehicle in the spring of 2007, which is also a violation of AQMD policy. AQMD does not authorize a practice burn of any vehicle.

6. At the October 23, 2007 Board Meeting, the IFPD Board violated the Brown Act, Section 54957(b)(i), by discussing the Fire Chief's contract relating to compensation in closed session. The Brown Act only allows discussion in closed session of "the appointment, employment, evaluation of performance, discipline, or dismissal of a public employee".
7. The Grand Jury learned, from testimony given by several expert witnesses, that due to the size of the department and the low volume of medical calls, it is difficult for the paramedics at the Idyllwild Fire Department to maintain their clinical assessment skills.
8. The Idyllwild Fire Department does not have a skilled grant writer, making it difficult to apply for the various grants available.
9. The fire department has been remiss in their security and validation of documents and records, as evidenced by the following examples:
 - A former member of the fire department was accused of having falsified certifications, which were signed by the chief, but were dated prior to the chief's employment by the fire department.
 - Another member of the fire department was accused of removing documents from the department and releasing them to a third party. A police report was filed on this incident.
10. The fire department currently exists as an individual entity in a high fire risk area otherwise serviced by several county, state, and federal fire resources. This results in the need for numerous mutual aid incidents, both fire and medical, which can lead to a more complex response effort. This complexity adds a further element of risk for the residents of the mountain communities when a major emergency occurs.

Recommendations

**Riverside County Board of Supervisors
Idyllwild Fire Protection District Board
Hemet Unified School District
County of Riverside Emergency Medical Services Agency
Riverside County Fire Department
County Service Area-38 Advisory Commission**

1. The Idyllwild School must develop and implement a safeguard procedure to ensure they have signed parental consent forms on file for the current school year for all students attending the school.
2. The fire department must, in future cases involving pediatric patients where there is any question or disagreement on transport, contact a base station for direction. If no contact can be made, they must follow county EMS policy as, reinforced in an EMS memorandum dated July 17, 2007, and transport the patient. This practice will reduce both the health and liability risks to the patient and the fire department.
3. Both the Fire Chief and the Principal of the Idyllwild School must schedule a meeting. This meeting is necessary to formulate a joint policy on when, and by whose authority; a sick or injured student will be transported by ambulance to the hospital or emergency treatment center. In addition to the Fire Chief and the Principal of the school, other designated attendees must include representatives of the Hemet Unified School District and the President of the Idyllwild Fire District Commission.
4. The Fire Commission must direct the Fire Chief to conduct specific training sessions for fire department personnel to ensure understanding and compliance with department policy on interactions and relations with the public. Also, the fire department personnel and Commission members must remember that they are servants of the public and always conduct themselves in a professional manner, which reflects positively on themselves and the department.
5. The fire department must review current AQMD Policies and Procedures to ensure that they are in compliance with all policies and directives regarding practice burns.
6. The Commission members must review the Brown Act to ensure compliance at all future meetings. If the Commission has any questions regarding the Brown Act, they must confer with legal counsel prior to conducting the meeting.

7. The fire department must establish a program with local hospital emergency rooms for their paramedics to work with doctors and nurses to maintain and improve their clinical assessment skills. A second option would be to implement 'ride alongs' with busier departments to observe and assist with various medical emergency intervention procedures.
8. The fire department must identify an individual as their grant writer and send that individual to one or more of the various classes available on grant writing in order to maximize their potential for receiving grant monies.
9. The Commission, working together with the Fire Chief, must develop policies and procedures to ensure the security of all department documents and records. The president of the board must appoint a committee of at least two board members, who, with the Chief, would verify all certifications of department personnel to guarantee that they are authentic and current. The committee will report, in open session, the results of this inspection to the Commission.

The commission must intensify its efforts to ensure that fire department personnel are compliant with their state and county certifications.

10. The IFPD Commission, in conjunction with Riverside County Fire, Riverside County EMS, and representatives of CSA 38, must explore the feasibility of all fire and medical aide services in the Idyllwild / Pine Cove area being combined under one agency, Riverside County Fire Department.

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