

# 2007-2008 GRAND JURY REPORT

## Pine Cove Fire Incident

### Background

The unincorporated mountain community of Pine Cove is located 52 miles east of Riverside in the San Jacinto Mountains. Pine Cove is part of County Service Area (CSA) 38, with fire protection provided by Cal Fire/Riverside County Fire Department hereafter referred to as Cal Fire. Pine Cove is serviced by the Pine Cove Water District (PCWD), which provides water to the community and maintains the fire hydrants in the area.

Cal Fire maintains a station in Pine Cove, Station #23, which is part of the Mountain Battalion commanded by a Battalion Chief. Station #23 is manned by three Cal Fire firefighters who work a 72-hour continuous shift. There are two assigned shifts, and a relief crew to cover Sundays. Cal Fire will substitute for any firefighter absent on any given shift with overtime personnel from other stations, if necessary.

Approximately ten volunteers from the Pine Cove area can be called upon for fire and emergency support to augment the career firefighters at Station #23.

Cal Fire has a mutual aid agreement with Idyllwild Fire Department for the mountain areas. This means Idyllwild Fire Department will also respond to fires in the Pine Cove area when dispatched or requested.

On the night of Sunday, December 9, 2007, at approximately 6:15 p.m., a '9-1-1' call was received regarding a structure fire two blocks from the fire station, on State Highway 243 in Pine Cove. Station #23 was dispatched and was the first responder to the fire, arriving at 6:22 p.m. Idyllwild Fire Department was dispatched to aid in the suppression of this fire, and was the second responder. A total of six pieces of equipment and twenty firefighters were dispatched to fight this structure fire. This incident was reported under control at 9:30 p.m., and the last unit left the area at 11:22 p.m. The structure was later declared a total loss.

### Findings

1. A structure fire occurred on State Highway 243 in Pine Cove on the evening of December 9, 2007. The Cal Fire relief crew at Pine Cove Station #23 was the first responder to the fire. The firefighters did not immediately utilize the engine's on-board computer and initially were unable to locate the nearest fire hydrant. This confusion led to a PCWD employee being unnecessarily called out to help locate the hydrant.

2. On the night of the structure fire, a Cal Fire, off-duty firefighter, called the PCWD and requested the assistance of a water district employee to aid in locating the nearest hydrant. The firefighter made this call from his home, based upon information he had gleaned listening to a scanner radio. The call to the PCWD was made without first confirming the need for assistance from the on-scene Incident Commander.
3. A PCWD employee responded to the request for assistance at the structure fire that night. When approaching the fire scene, he drove over a charged fire hose without authorization. This is a violation of California Vehicle Code §21708.
4. The PCWD employee responded to the incident in his personal vehicle rather than his assigned district vehicle. This was not a violation of PCWD policy. However, his personal vehicle had no marking designating it as a district vehicle and also had no flashing amber light to be displayed when parked at the scene of an emergency.
5. At the time of the Pine Cove fire incident, the Idyllwild Fire Department laid a fire hose across the road. This hose was poorly marked and not easily visible to on-coming traffic.
6. An Idyllwild firefighter, on that night, threw a trash can and hit the personal vehicle of the PCWD employee who had just driven over the fire hose. This firefighter's action resulted in damage to the employee's vehicle and a verbal confrontation with the district employee. Throwing an object at a moving vehicle is a misdemeanor violation of California Vehicle Code §23110.

## **Recommendations**

**Riverside County Board of Supervisors  
Riverside County Fire Department/Cal Fire  
Idyllwild Fire Protection District Board  
Pine Cove Water District Board**

1. The Cal Fire Battalion Chief for the Pine Cove station must review the procedure to ensure assigned personnel and relief crews are proficient in the use of the engine's on-board computer in locating fire hydrants in the Pine Cove area.
2. Cal Fire must ensure personnel understand that no community service agencies are to be contacted for assistance unless authorized by the on-scene Incident Commander or other recognized authority.

3. The Manager of the PCWD must instruct all employees regarding the California Vehicle Codes §21707 - §21709, pertaining to vehicle operation around fire hoses and safety zones. Employees must be instructed not to proceed into an incident safety zone without authorization by an on-scene fire or police authority.
4. PCWD must develop a policy requiring the use of district vehicles when responding to emergency situations. PCWD must install a permanent or portable amber light on all district vehicles. PCWD must provide to designated employees, a portable flashing amber light and a magnetic sign, to be displayed, if due to an emergency, they use their personal vehicle.
5. The Idyllwild Fire Department must critique this incident and further define their procedure for marking a fire hose crossing a road to ensure it is visible to on-coming traffic. This will increase the safety factor for all personnel and equipment involved in the incident.
6. The Idyllwild Fire Chief must instruct department personnel in the legal aspects of their actions, both physical and verbal, toward others and their personal property, while on duty.

**Report Issued: 06/25/08**  
**Report Public: 06/27/08**  
**Response Due: 09/23/08**