

RIVERSIDE COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT

In cooperation with the
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

210 West San Jacinto Avenue • Perris, California 92570 • (951) 940-8900 • Fax (951) 940-8910

John R. Hawkins
Fire Chief

August 23, 2006

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areas of Riverside
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Riverside County Grand Jury
Attn: Evelyn L. MacConnell
P.O. Box 829
Riverside, CA 92502

Dear Ms. MacConnell,

The Grand Jury Report released on June 30, 2006 regarding the City of Blythe Volunteer Fire Department makes some valid points regarding their status and performance.

We offer the following regarding the recommendations made by the Grand Jury:

MEDICAL TRAINING

Title 22 of the California Code of Regulations requires that all firefighters, police officers and lifeguards be trained in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). The Blythe Volunteers do not respond to medical emergencies and, because of their volunteer status, appear to not want to do so in the near future. However, Title 22 does require that all emergency responders be trained in first aid and CPR. The Blythe Volunteers should be trained to this level if for no other reason than providing emergency care for their own personnel at the scene of an emergency.

TRAINING

It is true that the Blythe Volunteers are not trained to California standards and make no assertions that they are. They have chosen to contract with Workplace Safety feeling that the training they receive through that company is adequate for their needs. It is occasionally apparent that because they are not trained to California standards that there can be a communication breakdown in that we don't always speak the same operational language. In fact, we have not clearly established what level of training the Blythe Volunteer Fire Department has completed.

Standardized California training allows firefighters from different departments to communicate and perform at a level that is commonly understood. Command, Tactics and Strategy, and safety issues are almost routine among mutual aid cooperators throughout California because of this standardized training and the Incident Command System. This issue is only important from an automatic or mutual aid perspective in that by themselves their department is thoroughly familiar with their operating policy and level of training.

However, it is of some concern that because their training comes from a company that is not primarily a fire service trainer that some of the training they receive may not be adequate, especially in light of the potential commercial development that is planned for Blythe. Their lack of basic fire training is a concern of ours due to our frequent interaction with the Blythe Volunteers. On a couple of occasions their lack of basic fire fighting knowledge has jeopardized the safety of our own firefighters while working inside a structure fire.

FIRE PREVENTION

The Blythe Fire Department is an all volunteer department as such they do not have anyone trained and available to conduct fire/life safety inspections. The City Building department is currently short on staff and needs to commit their inspectors to city building projects. Fire/life safety inspections are comprehensive and the building inspectors while trained in their specific discipline for building construction most likely are not trained in the California Fire Code.

Additionally the responsibility for fire/life safety inspection as outlined in Part 9, Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations states, "Construction or work for which fire department approval is required shall be subject to inspection by the chief."

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

It is unclear why the City of Blythe is resistant to accepting the offer to have Riverside County Fire Department respond to Medical Emergencies inside the "core city limits." Not wanting an additional Paramedic and more staff to provide care, especially at a life threatening event for a patient requiring Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and life saving drug therapy is confusing. Additional personnel would provide a much better level of service to the community and a higher quality of life for their residents.

CITY OF BLYTHE SHOULD CONTRACT WITH RIVERSIDE COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT

While this is an option that the City of Blythe may eventually want to explore, they are in no way obligated to do so. It is the policy of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and also that of the Riverside County Fire Department that "the local agency must submit a formal written request for a contract proposal to the CDF Unit and County Fire Chief.

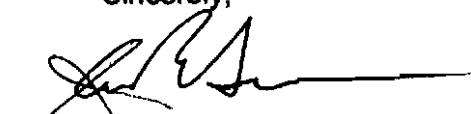
In order to improve its current overall fire protection level, the City of Blythe may decide to provide additional fire training to the Blythe Volunteers, create their own paid fire department, or contract with Riverside County Fire Department.

It should be noted that the Blythe Volunteer Fire Department enjoys a long and rich tradition of service to the community of Blythe. The firefighters are a proud and dedicated crew who do far more than respond to fires. They also support the public in many other ways.

The Riverside County Fire Department agrees that the fire service in the City of Blythe should be improved; however we also believe that it is entirely up to the city government as to how that is done.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this report.

Sincerely,



John R. Hawkins
Fire Chief

JRH:db

cc: Larry Parrish