

# Riverside County Fire Department

## Background

Riverside County contracts for fire protection with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF). The Riverside Ranger Unit of the CDF is headquartered in Perris, California. Since 1921, Riverside County has appointed the CDF Ranger-in-Charge as the County Fire Chief. There are eighty-nine fire stations in the county that have a mix of state, county contract, city or volunteer staff and equipment. In addition, there is a Hazardous Materials Response Team (HAZMAT) stationed in Beaumont. This team provides coverage for the entire county and responded to 490 calls in 1998.

## Findings

1. The fire department's master plan calls for a replacement of fire engines based on a twenty year instead of a seventeen-year cycle. Budget savings have been achieved by extending the replacement cycle to twenty years and using reserve funds. These funds will be exhausted in approximately two years.
2. New equipment of the latest technology is being procured. Due to the increased size and maintenance requirements, larger facilities are needed.
3. The location of the HAZMAT team can result in response times of one hour or more. Simultaneous calls from eastern and western county necessitate a dependence on mutual aid from the cities of Corona and Riverside.
4. The recently-established Desert Communities Empowerment Zone is receiving grants for certain infrastructure improvements in eastern Riverside County. This development will lead to demands for increased fire protection in the area.

## Recommendations

The Board of Supervisors to:

1. Adopt and continue to fund a twenty-year replacement cycle for fire engines. Use the cost averaging method to spread the cost and eliminate fluctuations in the budget process.
2. Direct the County Fire Department to adopt a time-phased financial plan for replacement or relocation of fire stations that are no longer adequate due to their location, size and age.

3. Provide a second HAZMAT team to cover the eastern county and relocate the team in Beaumont to the west county for more complete coverage and quicker response.

4. Direct the County Fire Department to be proactive in seeking funds that may be available from Empowerment Zone grants to upgrade Desert Center fire facilities and others needed to serve the extended rural areas.