



# County of San Mateo

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

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**Department:** COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**File #:** 22-365

Board Meeting Date: 5/17/2022

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**Special Notice / Hearing:** None  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**To:** Honorable Board of Supervisors

**From:** Michael P. Callagy, County Executive

**Subject:** Amendment to the Agreement with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt a resolution authorizing an amendment to the cooperative fire protection agreement with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to add additional positions for the term July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2025, with no change to the existing term of the agreement or not to exceed amount of \$99,200,463.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Since 1962, the County has contracted with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to provide fire protection services in County Service Area #1 (CSA #1) and all other unincorporated areas of the County, not protected by cities or fire districts. The San Mateo County Fire Department is an independent local government fire department responsible for structural fire suppression, emergency medical services, and rescue services. CAL FIRE employees provide the staffing for San Mateo County Fire Department apparatus. In addition to fire and emergency medical services, CAL FIRE employees staff the San Mateo County Fire Marshal's Office, providing fire protection planning for new construction, fire prevention activities, and life safety inspection in the County areas under the supervision of the Fire Marshal. CAL FIRE employees also act on the behalf of San Mateo County Fire Department and oversee the operations of three volunteer fire companies located in La Honda, Kings Mountain, and Loma Mar.

### **DISCUSSION:**

In June 2019, this Board approved Resolution No. 076642, adopting a 6-year agreement between CAL FIRE and the County for CAL FIRE to provide the staff for San Mateo County Fire Department fire protection services. The Six Year Operating Plan included eight new staff added over the course of the agreement. For the reasons set forth below, CAL FIRE is proposing an amendment to the agreement to incorporate updated fiscal sheets which include an additional three full-time equivalent (3.0 FTE) positions for the last three years of the agreement term (July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2025).

This request comes as CAL FIRE confronts a worsening wildfire problem across the state as well as local challenges that have arisen in the aftermath of the 2020 CZU Lightning Complex fire. Most notable is the increasing length and severity of fire season resulting in an increased workload on CAL FIRE employees. During periods of extreme fire activity, fire protection employees are routinely utilized to staff reserve engines in times of drawdown or weather events, fill emergency incident assignments, and provide coverage behind employees that are off duty.

This summer, San Mateo County Fire Department Engine 17 was committed to large fires for almost seven weeks straight, while deployed as a part of the California Mutual Aid system with other local fire agencies. These deployments result in holding additional staffing on duty to cover local fire stations while resources are sent to the larger incidents throughout the state. This pattern has continued to get worse over the past three years. Current staffing levels place additional stress on CAL FIRE firefighters, who are often held on duty and unable to take time off from a physically and emotionally demanding assignment. A recent evaluation of work-related injuries over the last three years showed that fire protection employees lost 8.5 days per year due to work-related injuries. Firefighting is inherently dangerous work, and the physical demands of the job, coupled with the increased commitment of firefighting resources and the lack of relief staffing, has created challenges.

The San Mateo County Fire Department has 16 daily post positions covering four County Fire engine companies and one County Truck company. Historically, San Mateo County has funded 2.76 personnel for each of the post positions. It takes at least 2.33 employees to fill a post-covered position without accounting for fire activity, training, vacation, and approved leave and unforeseen sick leave. Fire protection employees are required to complete a significant amount of initial and ongoing training for employee safety and to meet federal and state statutes. To cover a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week resource, 3.11 employees are required when considering the fire activity, recurring training, and leave. Compounding this problem is the attrition rate and the current challenges retaining paramedics.

For these reasons, the current 2.76 staffing model has resulted in firefighters and paramedics working up to 21 days straight and has strained the system. Over the last five years, employees have averaged 42 extra 24-hour days of overtime per year. The increased workload, combined with the stress from large fire incidents, has resulted in employees more prone to injury, additional employee support service needs, and staff turnover.

Therefore, CAL FIRE is requesting to increase depth and fire line capacity while also anticipating continued attrition. These changes will help to ensure a reliable work force and sufficient support staff are in place to sufficiently staff the San Mateo County Fire Department. The changes include:

- 1) Increase line suppression staffing on all San Mateo County Fire Department apparatus to a 3.11 FTE per posting staffing ratio (from the current 2.76).  
To achieve the recommended 3.11 staffing ratio, CAL FIRE proposes hiring two (2.0 FTE) Fire Apparatus Engineers (Paramedics) and hiring one (1.0 FTE) additional Fire Apparatus Engineer. Additionally, add a half (0.5) Battalion Chief - Line.

CAL FIRE recommends keeping the staffing level at Pescadero Fire Station at the current minimum of 3.0 firefighters per day and only staffing a fourth firefighter at that location when staffing is available. This is possible due to the increased number of volunteer firefighters now available in the area and the seasonal state CAL FIRE resource stationed at Pescadero.

- 2) Fully fund the Division Chief - Operations from a cost share position (0.5 FTE) to a full-time dedicated San Mateo County Fire Division Chief (1.0 FTE). Currently, this position is a 50/50 cost-shared position with Coastside Fire Protection District. With the increased response workload and to ensure an industry standard for span of control, CAL FIRE recommends a fully funded County Fire Division Chief of Operations.
- 3) Eliminate the Receptionist position
- 4) Eliminate the funding by the County for the "Amador" staffing of a State-owned fire wildland fire engine. Since the original contract was signed the State has fully funded a wildland engine year-round in San Mateo County to complete this work.
- 5) Re-fund a fleet maintenance position by hiring a full time (1.0 FTE) Fleet Equipment Manager. The San Mateo County Fire Department has 34 pieces of apparatus, including heavy and light vehicles. With the wear and tear placed on fire apparatus and the increased commitment of fire resources for longer periods of time. This position was previously eliminated.

CAL FIRE's actual costs are expected to remain below the not-to-exceed agreement amount with these changes. All CAL FIRE contracts are built on "top step" salaries for each position. The fact that many of these positions are filled by employees who are not "top step" results in cost savings. Additionally, several changes to the way in which CAL FIRE calculates the staff benefit rate for employees under contract have resulted in significant cost savings to the County.

It should be noted that the CAL FIRE Firefighters Local 2881 labor agreement will expire on June 30, 2022. San Mateo County anticipates additional contract changes with CAL FIRE may be required once a new labor agreement is reached.

**PERFORMANCE MEASURES:**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>FY 2020-21 Actual</b>	<b>FY 2021-22 Target</b>	<b>FY 2022-23 Target</b>
Number of Fire-Related Deaths and Injuries	0	0	0
Percent of State-Mandated Fire Occupancy Inspections Completed Annually	100%	90%	90%
Number of State-Mandated Fire Occupancy Inspections Requiring Re-Inspection	36%	10%	10%
Number of Fire Safety Documents Translated into a Second Language	8	10	10
Average Response Time Maintained for Rural-Based Fire Engine on Priority One Emergency Calls • Pescadero • Skylonda	14:38 13:56 15:22	11:40	11:40
Average Response Time Maintained for Urban-Based Fire Engine on Priority One Emergency Calls • Palomar Park	6:48 6:48	7:00	7:00
Percent of Defensible Space Inspections Completed on Properties Bordering Open Space	85.5%	90%	90%

Average Response Time Maintained for all Priority One Emergency Calls - CSA #1	6:18	7:00	7:00
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**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact associated with the amendment to the agreement effective July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2025, as the amendment does not alter the original not-to-exceed amount of \$99,200,463.