

## **What is the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District (ECCFPD)?**

The East Contra Costa Fire Protection District (ECCFPD) provides firefighting and prevention, emergency medical services (basic life support) and hazardous waste response. We serve 249 square miles in eastern Contra Costa County including the Cities of Brentwood and Oakley, and the communities of Discovery Bay, Bethel Island, Knightsen, Byron, Marsh Creek, and Morgan Territory. The District was formed in November 2002 by combining the Bethel Island Fire District, the East Diablo Fire District, and the Oakley Fire District. It is governed by a five member elected board of directors.

## **How much service does the District provide?**

In 2018, ECCFPD firefighters responded to 7,782 emergency 911 calls. The District staffs three fire stations: Station 52 (Brentwood), Station 53 (Oakley), and Station 59 (Discovery Bay). The District operates each station 24/7 with three-person crews of a Captain, an Engineer and a Firefighter or Senior Firefighter.

## **How does the District's service compare to national standards?**

Response times are critical - every minute counts. When a building is burning, the fire can double in size every minute. When ECCFPD responds to emergencies, it takes an average of 8 minutes, 19 seconds for help to arrive, but national standards recommend response times of no more than 5 minutes for fires and 4 minutes for other emergencies. The District is unable to respond to about 20 calls per month, and relies on neighboring agencies for back-up, which often takes longer to arrive.

## **Why do ECCFPD fire trucks respond to medical emergencies?**

When someone calls 911 for a medical emergency, speed matters, and the nearest source of qualified help is often a fire engine. However, fire engines are not sent to every medical emergency call. The Contra Costa County EMS determines when to send fire and ambulance resources for medical calls, in conformance with national standards. When the County's 911 Center receives medical calls, trained and certified dispatchers gather information on symptoms to determine how severe they are by asking a series of questions and determines how to respond. Based on severity of reported symptoms, both fire and ambulance (~75% of calls) or an ambulance alone (~25% of calls) is sent to the scene.

## **What would the District need to provide service at the National Fire Protection Association's recommended levels?**

ECCFPD's 2015 "Deployment Performance and Headquarters Staffing Adequacy Study" found it would need to operate three additional fire stations -- for a total of six stations -- to provide recommended service levels for this service area. The national standards also recommend that each of ECCFPD's stations have 4-person crews, an increase from the District's current 3-person crews.

ECCFPD's service is also hindered by its available equipment. Many of the ECCFPD's fire engines and water trucks are too old and need to be replaced within the next five years. Also, as buildings are increasingly taller – with three or more stories – ECCFPD needs more fire engines with longer ladders. Additionally, the District needs a training center where employees can do their 240 hours of training per year as required by the State Fire Marshal.

## **Why is the District unable to meet national standards for service?**

Though a lot of people are unaware of the problem, ECCFPD does not have sufficient funds to pay for the personnel, stations and equipment its needs to protect the community.

## **How is ECCFPD funded?**

As is the case for fire districts generally, almost all of ECCFPD's funding (96%) comes from a fixed portion of the 1% property taxes collected by the County based on assessed valuation of parcels in ECCFPD's service area.

After the County collects property taxes, the revenue is divided among the agencies serving the property, including the county itself, cities, and schools, based on a formula set by state law. ECCFPD receives an average of 7% of the County's property taxes from the parcels in its service area. This is substantially less than for other comparable, nearby fire districts. For example, Contra Costa County Fire Protection District receives 12% and the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District receives 14%.

This difference results from a state law that divided up property taxes based on community services provided in the late 1970's. At that time, ECCFPD's service area was largely rural, with lower needs for emergency services, and the community's fire protection was provided by volunteer and paid-on-call departments with extremely low costs. Over the next 40+ years, the community has become more populated and developed, requiring that fire service be provided by professional firefighters. Unfortunately, though, the formula for distributing property taxes remains the same, and changing it to better fund fire and emergency services would require passing new State law. This would be very difficult to accomplish, as it would take money away from cities and schools.

## **Why doesn't the District have volunteer firefighters anymore?**

Our community used to be small and rural. As it has become more urban and suburban, and full-time professional firefighters were hired, it has been harder to supplement service with volunteers. ECCFPD was able to rely in part on paid-on-call and volunteer firefighters as recently as 2012, but the with advances in firefighting technology and approaches, training and equipment costs for this help proved to be just as high as for full-time staff. Also, ECCFPD found there was insufficient interest in such positions from people able to help.

## **Why has the District been closing existing fire stations?**

Since 2008, ECCFPD has consolidated from 8 partially-staffed fire stations to 3 fully-staffed stations due to financial shortfalls and operational needs. ECCFPD has closed several older stations because the buildings were not built for, and cannot safely or comfortably house our 24-hour staff. Also, they are not in the right locations to meet the community's needs. In their place, the needs new stations, which is why ECCFPD worked with the City of Oakley to construct a new Station 55, and is working with the City of Brentwood on a new Station 51.

But even with new stations being built, ECCFPD can't afford to staff more than three stations with firefighting crews. As a result, Station 55 is being used for other ECCFPD purposes until we can afford to move in a new fire-fighting crew.

## What has ECCFPD done to live within its means?

In recent years, ECCFPD has made structural changes to improve its service become more efficient. Since 2010, the District has:

- Closed 5 of its original 8 fire stations;
- Reduced the size of its firefighting staff from 57 to 31;
- Frozen salaries from 2007 until 2012;
- Sold/prepared to sell surplus equipment and other property;
- Minimized benefit costs in its contracts with its union, Firefighters Local 1230 by:
  - Requiring all union employees to pay the full cost of their contributions toward their pensions, consistent with State pension reforms.
  - Instituting a 50% cost sharing for future medical insurance cost increases, which reduces the District's costs for retirees' health coverage; and also
  - Paying firefighters \$400 per month if they sign up for health coverage through a spouse or partner's employment rather than through ECCFPD. When this benefit is chosen, ECCFPD's saves as much as \$15,000 per year per employee.

## How is development related to the District's service deficits?

Most properties within ECCFPD do not contribute enough money for ECCFPD to provide service to the development at levels consistent with national standards. Without adequate financial support programs in place, development will damage ECCFPD's overall service levels. ECCFPD's policy is for new development to pay its fair share towards the costs of providing service to these developments. With adequate program in place, growth can contribute to the ECCFPD's ability to provide service. The District estimates that by 2040, service demands due to new growth will require 3 new stations, in addition to the 6 stations already needed (but not available) to appropriately serve the current population.

## What options has the District considered in the past to address its funding problems?

The District has explored a variety of ways to secure additional funding.

- **State law:** The property tax formulas which harm the District are a problem with State law. The California Constitution would require a 2/3 vote of the Legislature to change the rules. ECCFPD does not view this as a feasible solution. Also, redirecting property tax revenues would reduce funds for other public agencies like cities and schools.
- **Local revenue measures:** ECCFPD and cities in the community have unsuccessfully proposed three types of revenue measures to fund fire protection services:
  - In June 2012, ECCFPD voters rejected against a parcel tax.
  - In April 2015, ECCFPD's property owners protested a benefit assessment.
  - In November 2016, Brentwood and Oakley voters voted down a utility tax available for public safety.
- **Grant funding:** In November 2012, ECCFPD received a \$7.8 million grant under the federal Staffing for Enhanced Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program, which allowed it to hire or rehire 18 firefighters and reopen 2 closed fire stations. After the

SAFER grant funding expired in November of 2014, ECCFPD had to lay off the additional firefighters.

- **Consolidation:** The District has investigated mergers with other fire protection agencies. However, consolidation is not possible while the District has insufficient funding to serve its service area.

### **What is the District's current approach to addressing its funding issues?**

The District has a two-pronged approach to addressing its funding issues.

1. ECCFPD is exploring the feasibility of a ballot measure to provide guaranteed, stable and dedicated funding for fire protection and emergency response services.
2. To address new growth, ECCFPD is working with the City of Brentwood, the City of Oakley, and Contra Costa County to update their development impact fees. This will require new developments to pay for equipment and buildings used to provide fire and emergency services.
3. Where possible, the District's also seeks for new development to join a community facilities district (CFD) and pay a special tax that will cover the operating costs of providing service to that development.

### **What is the District's position on the "Initiative to Add a New Chapter to the City of Brentwood Municipal Code Requiring the City of Brentwood to Annually Spend Additional Specified Funds for Designated Emergency Services"?**

The initiative, sponsored by East County Voters for Equal Protection, would require the City of Brentwood to spend additional revenue on additional emergency services, which *could* include fire protection services (but might not). Unfortunately, it's unclear how much, if any, of this funding the City Council would share with ECCFPD. Because this potential source of funding would be so unstable/unreliable, it may not help ECCFPD to increase its staffing and services.

### **What are the consequences of continuing to underfund fire protection services?**

- **Lack of funding for firefighting services places lives and property in the community at risk.** Response times are critical. Without an appropriate firefighting response, a fire in a building can double its size every minute.
- **Lack of adequate fire protection services leads to higher insurance rates and can even affect the availability of coverage.** Many insurers factor the availability of effective fire protection services into their rates. There have been reports in the community that insurance rates have increased significantly due to ECCFPD's service levels, with some homeowners in Bethel Island and Morgan Territory actually losing insurance coverage.
- **Without new sources of revenue, service levels may continue to decrease.** Most property in the District, both existing and new development, do not generate sufficient financial support for the District to provide adequate fire protection service. Development that continues this trends contributes to ECCFPD's service deficits, spreading limited resources across more people and properties needing protection, especially as wild fire risks increase and spread Statewide. Development that provides adequate funding can help ECCFPD close these deficits.