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SACRAMENTO METROPOLITAN FIRE DISTRICT **Newsletter**

► **CALL VOLUME HITS HISTORIC HIGHS**



The number of calls for fire, medical and other emergency services has increased substantially since 2005, a trend that continued in 2013. Last year, Metro Fire units responded to more than 84,000 calls - nearly 4,000 more calls than in 2012. Metro Fire crews kicked-off 2014 with their busiest month on record, responding to nearly 7,700 calls during the month of January.

With six engine companies still closed since the economic downturn, fire crews are working harder than ever to meet the increased call demand. However, a review of Metro Fire's emergency response shows average response times to serious incidents have increased each year since 2009.

"December 2013 was the busiest month our medic units have ever seen," stated Ric Maloney, RN and Metro Fire Continuous Quality Improvement Manager. "The flu has definitely played a role, but the overall trend is simply more people going to the hospital every day."

As an all-risk fire district, Metro Fire handles emergencies of every kind: medical aids, structure fires, Hazardous Materials incidents, explosions, animal rescues, wildland fires, and more. Thirty-two fire engines, six trucks, and 21 medics respond to calls in the 417 square miles that Metro Fire serves.

It seems nearly every night there is news about a fire that destroyed somebody's business or home. National statistics show that 80% of businesses that suffer a major fire incident never reopen their doors.



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As California struggles with one of the most severe droughts on record, the increased fire danger to the region cannot be overstated. Metro Fire crews have already seen a 500 percent increase in vegetation fires so far in 2014, compared to January and February of 2013. This year, more than ever, taking proactive steps to minimize fire danger is going to be critical. It is important to maintain a minimum of 30 feet of defensible space around your house; and be extremely cautious when participating in activities or using equipment with the potential to start a fire.

This year's drought declaration follows two dry years. Despite recent rains, current moisture levels in grasses, shrubs and other wildland "fuels" remain extremely low, at levels not normally seen until late summer. These dry fuels will start fires easier and move faster. As with all fires, rapid response is critical. Deputy Chief Chris Holbrook stated, "Metro Fire's number one priority is always Life Safety. As fire danger continues to increase, we will adjust our staffing and operations, to the extent we can, to best protect our communities." Unfortunately, with six fire engines still closed due to budget deficits, the community may experience longer response times during this critically dry fire season.

Fires raging through California this year have highlighted how quickly homes, communities, forests, and the economy can be destroyed. Locally, wildland fires represent 37% of Metro's fire responses; that's an average of 869 wildland fires every year. The risks posed by these fires highlight our need for a wildland fire prevention program. Metro Fire was recently awarded a grant of \$993,504 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to establish such a program. The goal is to reduce wildfire risk and increase community resiliency through public education and the development of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, helping Metro Fire and our local communities for years to come.

► BOARD CONSIDERS REVENUE MEASURE TO RESTORE SERVICES, IMPROVE RESPONSE TIMES

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For several years, Metro Fire has reduced its operating costs in various ways to address a significant loss of property tax revenues caused by the recession (cumulatively, \$93 million). By 2012, these cost-cutting actions reduced our annual expenditures by \$31 million. Property tax revenue is the primary source of revenue to fund our firefighting crews.

Over the same period, service demands in our district continue to increase year after year. For this reason, Metro's response time performance in getting to fire incidents has gradually eroded to the point where the Board of Directors has been examining options for supplemental revenue sources to restore our emergency response capacity.

At its February 27 meeting, the Board of Directors received two reports to help it determine whether Metro Fire should conduct a fire suppression benefit assessment balloting process under Proposition 218 to help fund restoration of fire suppression services to properties. These reports and related information have been posted for public review at <http://metrofire.ca.gov/index.php/fire-assessment>.

The Board will determine whether to move forward with a Resolution of Intent to form an assessment district at a public hearing in late March or early April. Please check this page for updates.

"Forged from a long line of tradition, we are Metro Fire - working together to serve our community with honor, integrity and selfless devotion to duty."



DISTRICT EXPANDS RESERVE FIREFIGHTER PROGRAM

Want to be a valued team member at Metro Fire, supporting our "all-hazard" operations? Then look into our Reserve Firefighter Program. These firefighters are not full-time employees of the District. They are civilians who are willing to drop whatever they are doing at the sound of their pagers, and help respond to fire, medical and other emergencies in our community.

The success of this program has prompted us to expand it. This year, Metro Fire will hire up to 25 more Reserve Firefighters to enhance the program. Currently, all Reserves operate from Rio Linda, but reserve stations will eventually expand to other areas of the District. Firefighter-specific training will be a regular activity for both experienced and newly-hired Reserves.

The Reserve Firefighter Program can provide a valuable career pathway, where the basics of firefighting can be learned while providing support to firefighting operations. Reserve Firefighters do not enter dangerous environments, but they

do drive and operate water tenders, which are used to supply water in areas with limited access. They also staff an air unit to refill firefighters' air cylinders, and they establish rehab stations on larger fires for crews to recover after extensive effort.

"The design of the expanded Reserve Program is twofold," states Bill Daniels, Metro Fire Assistant Chief. "We can reduce operational costs by internally supporting the needs of the District, while developing and mentoring the future firefighters within our own community." Reserve Firefighters will receive a small stipend for their time on duty, but the skills they will learn are invaluable.

► **HELPING US HELP YOU**

When you or a loved one has a medical emergency, nothing is more important at that moment than help arriving quickly. Below are a few simple steps you can do to help Metro Fire crews find you as fast as possible and provide the appropriate medical treatment.

- Make sure your house numbers are visible from the street. We recommend at least four inches tall and lighted at night.
- If you have a bedridden loved one, consider moving them to an easily accessible downstairs room.
- Create a clear pathway to and around the ill person.
- Maintain a log of each family member's medical history, current medications and any allergies to medications.

When someone you love is having a true emergency, time is all that matters. So take a few minutes now to help us help you; it just might be YOUR life saved.