

# 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. The county appropriates funds to augment and improve the level of protection of an additional 3.5 million acres of local land and protect lives and structural property in unincorporated areas of the county. Riverside County was one of the first counties in California to contract with the CDF for this additional fire protection.

The first county-owned fire stations and engines were provided in 1946. As the county grew in population and increased its structural development, the county authorized acquisition of additional facilities and equipment.

Today the Riverside County Fire Department has:

Eighty-seven fire stations

One hundred fifty-four engine companies

Three truck companies

Six hundred seventy personnel paid by state and county

One thousand two hundred fire suppression volunteers (paid only when fighting fires)

Seven hundred unpaid Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services volunteers

In 1997, the Riverside County Fire Department/CDF responded to:

Nine thousand seven hundred fifty-three fires

Fifty-two thousand forty medical aid calls

Two thousand five hundred twenty fire menace standbys

Two thousand six hundred seven public service assists

Four hundred ninety-two hazardous materials calls

Three thousand five hundred fifty-seven miscellaneous calls

This represents a total of 70,969 incidents to which they responded. This is an increase of 1 percent above the 1996 incident total.

Some city fire departments have three or four-person engine companies. Riverside County has two-person engine companies manned mostly by firefighters with the classification of Firefighter I. They are paid volunteers who are seasonal employees limited to a maximum of nine months employment each year.

## Findings

1. National Fire Protection Association Regulation 1500-1992 stipulates that a minimum of two firefighters are required to enter a burning structure. Three firefighters per engine would assure one firefighter outside to attend the equipment and increase their efficiency and safety.
2. Based on an extensive study by the City of Corona Fire Department, "Paramedic-1996," a proposal has been presented to the county to add a paramedic to each fire engine in their city. If this system is implemented, it will provide emergency medical aid several minutes before an ambulance is on the scene.
3. A San Diego County Fire Department study shows that the advanced life support response time could be reduced by 25 percent in a Fire Fighter/Paramedic shared system. As first responder on the scene to a 911 call, fire department statistics show this is usually three to five minutes before an ambulance arrives.
4. The majority of permanent firefighters started as volunteers and as volunteers received the same intensive training as regular firefighters.

## **Recommendation**

Board of Supervisors initiate a feasibility study for funding an increase in the County Fire Department staffing levels from two-person engine companies to three-person engine companies. The third person is to be a firefighter/paramedic.