

IT'S NOT YOUR GRANDFATHER'S FIRE DEPARTMENT!

INTRODUCTION

The San Luis Obispo City Fire Department (Fire Department) provides the City with a variety of emergency and non-emergency services delivered to the community. These services are part of the public safety programs and are intended to provide the most effective, efficient and safe services possible.



The Fire Department also has reciprocal service agreements with San Luis Obispo County, other cities and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to assist in time of need. CAL FIRE and the County of San Luis Obispo have had a cooperative fire protection relationship since 1929. CAL FIRE has 21 stations in San Luis Obispo County, which includes two stations adjacent to the city of San Luis Obispo. There are six fire stations in or near the city limits including the two CAL FIRE locations.

AUTHORITY

California Penal Code: §925a states:

“The grand jury may at any time examine the books and records of any incorporated city or joint powers agency located in the county. In addition to any other investigatory powers granted by this chapter, the grand jury may investigate and report upon the operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments, functions, and the method or system of performing the duties of any such city or joint powers agency and make such recommendations as it may deem proper and fit.”

PURPOSE

This report is intended to provide some insight into the most critical and most important services provided by the Fire Department and how these service priorities have changed.

METHOD

As part of its investigation, Grand Jurors:

- Reviewed the City of San Luis Obispo Budget for 2005-2007 with the Financial Plan
- Interviewed the Chief of the San Luis Obispo Fire Department (Chief)
- Toured Fire Station One
- Interviewed the Fire Department Administrative Analyst
- Obtained a copy of the Request for Proposals for Fire Department Master Plan
- Reviewed the City of West Covina Fire Department Mission/Budget Statement and the Los Angeles Fire Department EMS Resource Deployment Plan
- Reviewed the web site “FIRE CHIEF” (<http://firechief.com/>)
- Reviewed the Fire Department web site for confirmation data and fire station pictures (<http://www.slocity.org/fire/prevention.asp>)

HISTORY

The earliest recorded discussions regarding fire services occurred in 1872 and focused on acquiring two hose carts for the Goodwill Hose Companies 1 & 2. After the carts were purchased they were housed in the livery stables at Nipomo and Higuera Streets. In 1876 the Fire Department was formally organized. The last horse drawn fire apparatus, a 1906 Seagraves Chemical Hose wagon, is on display at the Fire Station #1, 2160 Santa Barbara Avenue.

The oldest of the current stations is located at 126 North Chorro Street and was built in 1954. The newest station located at 2160 Santa Barbara Avenue opened in 1996.

NARRATIVE

As part of Public Safety, the Fire Department is responsible for a variety of service functions. Of the approximately 4,400 response calls the Fire Department received in 2007, over 80% of the calls were non-fire related. The majority of these calls (63%) were for medical emergencies. While fire suppression remains the number one objective of the department, medical emergency calls have now become the major service demand.

The department has fifty-five full time employees, with forty-three designated as fire suppression employees. The department positions below the Fire Chief include battalion chiefs, captains, engineers, firefighters, administrative and fire prevention bureau personnel along with one mechanic. Many of the firefighters receive specialized training in medical emergencies and are licensed paramedics and the rest are Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT).

The emergency response programs protect life, the environment, and property. The program goals include: timely response, providing advanced life support in medical emergencies, limiting environmental damage caused by a release of hazardous materials, and keeping property damage to a minimum.

The Fire Department has five major programs:

- Administration
- Emergency Response
- Hazard Prevention Training
- Technical Services
- Disaster Preparedness

The Fire Department budget of \$ 9,686,427 (2006-2007) represents 22.3% of the City's General Fund budget of \$43.4 million. The department may receive between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in grant money each year to supplement the budget. The grant money is used for protective clothing, breathing apparatus, education, etc. The department does attempt to recover money from insurance companies for clean up expenses when applicable.

At the start of this decade many cities began to study their procedures used in responding to the large numbers of medical emergency calls. In January 2001 the City of Los Angeles Fire Department implemented a five year Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Resource Deployment Plan. The goal was to increase paramedic coverage, improve overall EMS service delivery, and provide a better working environment through reducing workload for responders. The plan included adding an ambulance to most of the fire stations. The ambulance is dispatched with a two man firefighter-paramedic team to medical emergency calls. The medical team provides the initial first aid, medical assessment and if needed the ambulance would transport the patient to the hospital. By the end of the second year, the total number of ambulances increased from 98 to 115. In April 2003, the Department achieved one of the plans objectives by deploying at least one paramedic resource in every fire station district in the City. According to the Fire Watch newsletter, the Los Angeles Fire Department is pleased with the results of their EMS Plan. Los Angeles is able to cover the added costs in equipment by billing for the ambulance service.¹

The West Covina Fire Department had 7,080 response calls during 2003-2004 which includes 5,907 medical emergencies. In order to help balance their budget in 2004, the West Covina Fire

¹ May 2004 LA Fire Watch newsletter

Department began providing paramedic ambulance services when responding to medical calls in an effort to increase service levels while offsetting public safety costs. By combining ambulance transportation services with well positioned first responders staffing fire engines, service levels to the community have increased in a cost effective manner.² West Covina used this system in concert with their City Council's goal to balance their budget.

The City of San Luis Obispo has sited its fire stations and selected its equipment, based on past studies that would support the arrival of emergency equipment to the call scene in under four minutes. San Luis Ambulance Service, Inc. provides transport when the medical emergency requires that the patient be taken to a local hospital. This service is not currently part of the Fire Department.

In an August 1, 2007 article posted on the Fire Chief web site, Bruce Evans, (EMS Chief, North Las Vegas Fire Department) reviewed the dramatic changes taking place in EMS offered by Fire Departments. In reference to equipment used, Mr. Evans states "There may be fewer engines and more ambulances deployed in systems where fire-based EMS is the main provider. As engineering practices reduce fires and the baby boomers impact the health care system, look for officials to staff peak-load units in the fire service or convert engine companies to ambulance or rescue companies."

Recently the Chief submitted a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Fire Department Master Plan and Standards of Coverage³ which has been approved by the City Council. The RFP states: *"Specifically, a Master Plan is needed which includes a Standards of Coverage analysis to provide an objective and systematic examination of the Department's policies, practices, and activities in the context of the City's growth in population and existing jurisdictional area. Moreover, the intent of this process will be to provide an evaluation by an independent source for the development of information to aid in policy direction for the Department's growth and response to changing service demands related to current and future growth."*⁴

² West Covina 2006 budget statement

³ See www.slocity.org/

⁴ See www.slocity.org/

The goal of the Standards of Coverage analysis is to determine the state of current and future fire and emergency medical service needs. The study will specifically look at the City's demand with regard to fire stations, staffing and equipment location.

CONCLUSIONS

Service demands have changed for the Fire Department. Of the 4,356 calls processed by the Fire Department in 2007, only 188 calls (4%) were classified as structure fires. EMS/Rescue calls totaled 2,750; hazardous condition responses numbered 30, and the remaining calls were classified as "other responses".⁵

The Master Plan Study and Standards of Coverage Component is intended to evaluate the Fire Department needs and its response to changing service demands related to current and future growth.

FINDINGS

1. The volume of non-fire related calls has become the primary service provided by the Fire Department.
2. The Fire Department has received approval and funding to hire an independent consulting firm to review the Master Plan and the Standards of Coverage. The review will include but is not limited to;
 - Equipment and personnel needs
 - Current and future fire and emergency medical needs
 - Non-response related services such as prevention, training and administration
3. Other cities' have introduced an ambulance service to increase service levels while offsetting public safety costs.

⁵ Includes; minor collision, public assistance, electrical checks, public welfare checks, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Fire Department should use the results of the independent study to determine whether equipment and Fire Department personnel are appropriate to meet changing department service demands. (Finding #2)
2. The Fire Department should evaluate the benefits versus costs of adding an ambulance service. (Finding #3)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

A response to the recommendations is required from both of the following:

- San Luis Obispo Mayor and City Council
- San Luis Obispo City Fire Chief

All responses shall be submitted to the Presiding Judge at the San Luis Obispo Superior Court by **October 28, 2008**. Please provide a copy to the Grand Jury as well. The mailing addresses for delivery are:

Presiding Judge	Grand Jury
Presiding Judge Martin Tangeman Superior Court of California 1035 Palm, Room 385 San Luis Obispo, CA 93408	San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury P.O. Box 4910 San Luis Obispo, CA 93403

APPENDIX A

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

GENERAL STATEMENT OF DUTIES:

FIRE CHIEF: Performs highly responsible and professional work in planning, organizing and directing the activities of the Fire Department; takes charge of and directs departmental personnel and equipment at the scene of major fires and other disasters. The Fire Chief also manages the city-wide disaster preparedness program.

BATTALION CHIEF: Under general supervision of the Fire Chief, the Battalion Chief directs fire suppression, medical emergencies, rescue and hazardous materials spills and releases, training, and related activities as well as performs administrative work.

FIRE CAPTAIN: Is under the general supervision of the Battalion Chief or Fire Chief. Under direction, takes charge of a fire station and is responsible for an assigned shift; supervises personnel engaged in fighting fires, medical emergencies, rescue work, hazardous materials spills, and fire prevention activities in protecting life and property.

FIRE ENGINEER: Under supervision of the Fire Captain or Fire Battalion Chief, the Fire Engineer operates and maintains fire pumping engines and other firefighting equipment, participates in firefighting, emergency medical response, hazardous materials releases and spills, and fire prevention activities. The fire engineer may assume the duties of Fire Captain on a temporary basis when necessary.

FIREFIGHTER: Under general supervision of a Fire Engineer or Fire Captain, the Firefighter participates in firefighting, rescue, emergency medical aid, and fire prevention activities in

protecting life and property; operates and maintains fire pumping engines and other firefighting equipment on a relief basis.

FIRE VEHICLE MECHANIC: Performs responsible preventative maintenance and mechanical repair work related to the maintenance and repair of specialized fire vehicles and related mechanical equipment.⁶

MEDICAL TRAINING:

The Fire Captain, Fire Engineer, and Fire Fighter will have knowledge of the principles of first aid and advanced life support as trained Emergency Medical Technicians. The Battalion Chief will also have knowledge of the principles of Emergency Medical Services and equipment. The Fire Department will have between twenty-two and twenty-four paramedics on duty at various stations and shifts. Paramedic training is integrated into other staff positions.

WORKLOAD MEASURES:

TYPES OF RESPONSES	NUMBER OF CALLS (2007)	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CALLS
EMS/Rescue	2,750	63%
Structure Fires	188	4%
Hazardous Condition/Material Responses	30	1%
Other Responses: ⁷	1,388	32%
TOTAL CALLS	4,356⁸	

⁶ General Duties from City of San Luis Obispo Human resources

⁷ Includes; minor collision, public assistance, electrical checks, public welfare checks, etc.

⁸ Based on City of SLO 2007 Fire Department Statistics

FIRE STATIONS



Fire Station One (2160 Santa Barbara Avenue)

Opened: 1996

Staff: Battalion Chief and 4 person paramedic truck,
Administrative & Prevention staff

Vehicles: Truck 1, Battalion Chief vehicle, Incident
Command Van, 1 Strike Team Leader vehicle, 6 Staff
Vehicles



Fire Station Two (126 N. Chorro Street)

Opened: 1954

Staff: 3 person Paramedic Company

Vehicles: Engine 2, State owned Engine 271



Fire Station Three (1280 Laurel Lane)

Opened: 1960

Staff: 3 person Paramedic Company

Vehicles: Engine 3, Brush vehicle



Fire Station Four (1395 Madonna Road)

Opened: 1978

Staff: Base of operations for Fire Captain, 3 person

Paramedic Engine Company

Vehicles: Engine 4, Squad 1

VEHICLE LIST

HEAVY UNITS:

Truck 1	1993 Pierce	1500 Gallon per min(Gpm) 75' Aerial Ladder
Engine 2	2000 Pierce	1500 Gpm Triple Combination Pumper (TCP)
Engine 3	2003 Pierce	1500 Gpm TCP
Engine 4	1997 Pierce	1500 Gpm TCP
Engine 5	1991 Pierce	1500 Gpm TCP
Engine 6	2007 Westmark Type 2	1000 Gpm TCP
Type 3 Urban Search & Rescue		

Road miles put on heavy units from 2006/2007: 31,003

OTHER STATION ASSOCIATED VEHICLES:

Squad 1	1998 Ford E-450 Wheeled Coach Emergency Patient Transport
Command	2000 Chevrolet Tahoe 4 X 4 Command Vehicle
Command	2003 Ford Crown Victoria Chief's Command Vehicle
Command/Training	2000 Ford F-150 4 X 4 Crew Cab
Patrol 1	2008 Ford F-550 4x4
	2008 Ford F-550

These associated specialized vehicles are moved around between various stations, but are normally stored at the large impound yard at Station #1.