



**2010-2011
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
Fire Safety and Protection in Madera County
Fire Division Chief**

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Introduction:

The Grand Jury determined that the functions of the Fire Division Chief (Chief) are integral to fire safety and protection in Madera County.

The Chief has been in his current position for approximately 2 and 1/2 years. The Chief is a CAL FIRE state employee with authority over CAL FIRE facilities and personnel in three counties: Madera, Merced, and Mariposa. The Chief, in addition to his CAL FIRE duties, contracts CAL FIRE services to counties. For instance, CAL FIRE contracts with Madera County and City to staff fire stations. The City of Chowchilla does not contract with CAL FIRE. It maintains its own volunteer fire fighting force, and is not included under the jurisdiction of the Chief.

Findings:

The Grand Jury found that CAL FIRE, Madera County, and Madera City all own fire stations. CAL FIRE owns and staffs five stations during fire season. Outside of the fire season, November 1 through April 30, Madera County contracts with CAL FIRE to staff four of these stations. Madera County owns six fire stations staffed with CAL FIRE employees and 15 volunteer companies. Madera City owns two fire stations and staffs through CAL FIRE.

The Grand Jury found that there are 18 permanent staff assigned to the five CAL FIRE stations, and approximately 160 Madera County Paid Call volunteer Firefighters, all of whom are equipped and insured by the public entities being served. Training is done by CAL FIRE.

The Grand Jury found that the County funds its own year-round operations, staff, and volunteer firefighters. Volunteers are an integral component of the overall fire defense efforts. The County provides a station from which to operate, training, and equipment in the form of vehicles, firefighting gear, and radios. The County has funded a change from broad-band to narrow-band radios for full-time firefighters but not for volunteers. Broad-band and narrow-band radios are not compatible. Several fire stations are quite old and need upgrading and/or replacement; they include Stations #1, #3, and #9. Station #1 was constructed in the 1930's. The County has replaced seven fire engines over the past four to five years, at a cost of \$300,000 each. Firefighters have a sufficient amount of personal equipment and supplies available to them.

The Grand Jury found that on September 15, 2010, the Board of Supervisors cut \$520,000 from the fire budget. Two permanent positions have been lost as a result.

The Grand Jury found that operations for the Ahwahnee and Raymond stations were not fully funded, resulting in closure from November 1, 2010. However, the Board of Supervisors recently voted to restore funding beginning January 3, 2011, for both Raymond and Ahwahnee.

Conclusions:

The Grand Jury concludes that the Chief is well-qualified and motivated, yet realistic, given the current economic condition of the County and budget constraints.

The Grand Jury concludes that Stations #1, #3, and #9 do not meet the needs of firefighting personnel.

The Grand Jury concludes that the incompatibility of volunteer radios with full-time staff radios is a concern.

Recommendations:

The Grand Jury recommends adequate resources for fire protection and safety be provided.

The Grand Jury recommends that the County should begin feasibility studies for upgrading and/or replacement of Fire Stations #1, #3, and #9. Station #1 should be made a priority.

The Grand Jury recommends that volunteers be equipped with compatible radios.

Respondent: Written response required pursuant to PC933(c)

Madera County Board of Supervisors
200 West Fourth Street
Madera, CA 93637